BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

ANNIE BESANT

C. P. RAMASWAMI AIYAR

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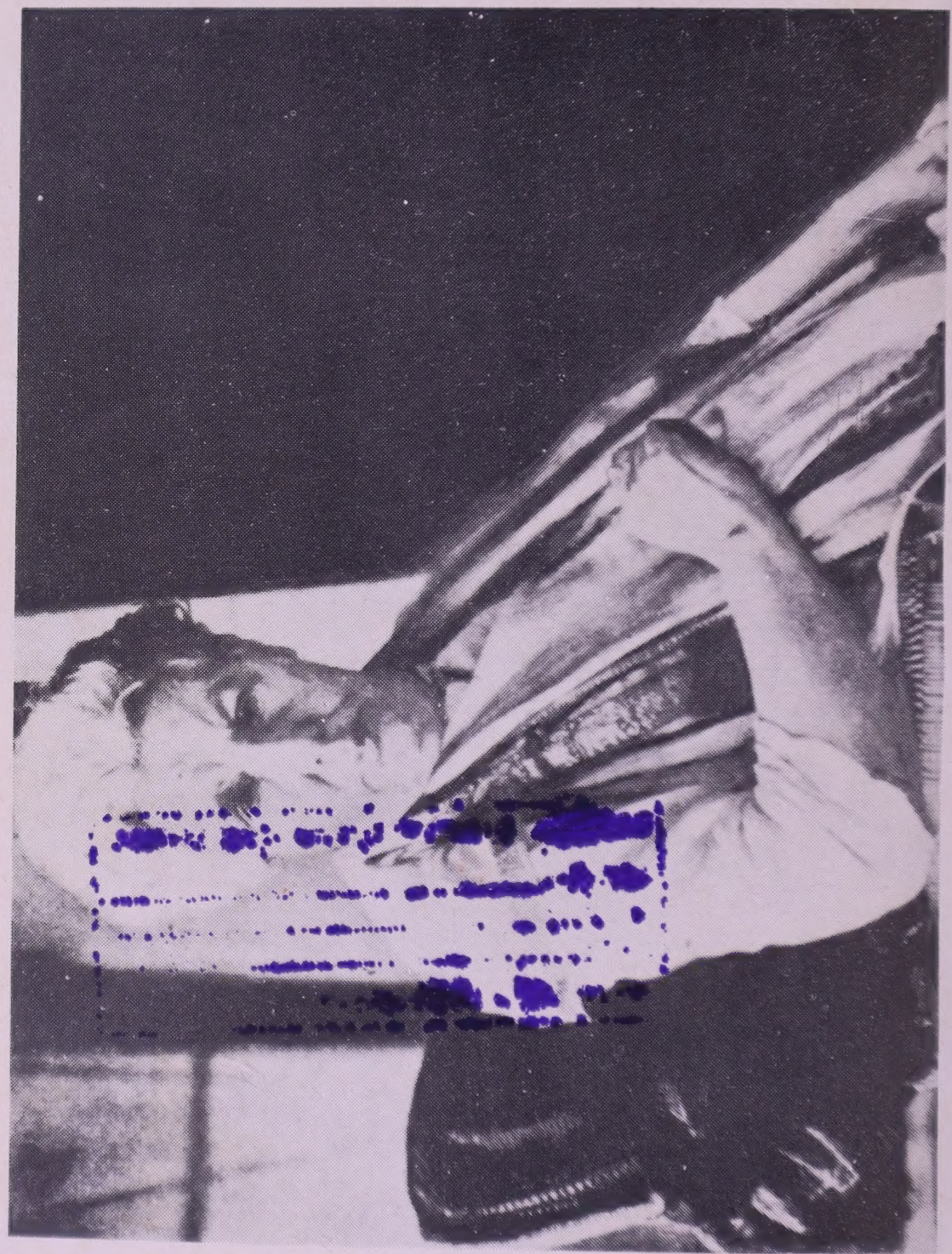

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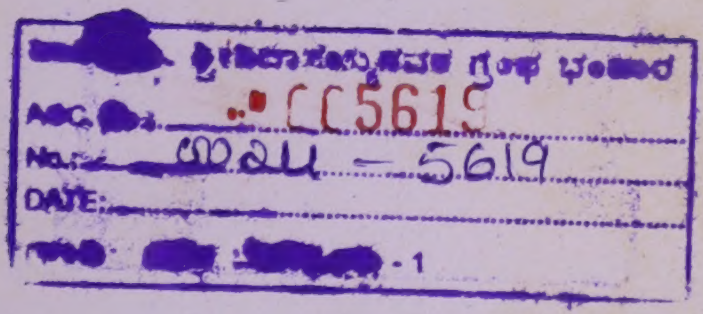

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ABOUT THE SERIES

The object of the Series is the publication of biographies of those eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and the struggle for independence.

It is essential for the present and coming generations to know something about these great men and women. Except in a few cases, no authoritative biographies are available. The Series has been planned to remove this lacuna and comprises handy volumes containing simple and short biographies of our eminent leaders written by competent persons who know their subject well. The books in the Series are of 200 to 300 pages each and are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace more elaborate biographies.

Though desirable, it may not be possible to publish the biographies in a chronological order. The work of writing these lives has to be entrusted to persons who are well equipped to do so and, therefore, for practical reasons, it is possible that there might be no historical sequence observed. It is hoped, however, that within a short period all eminent national personalities will figure in this Series.

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PREFACE

It was in 1893 that Dr. Annie Besant completed her Autobiography. She observed in her Preface:

"The autobiographer does his work because he thinks that, at the cost of some unpleasantness to himself, he may throw light on some of the typical problems that are vexing the souls of his contemporaries..... Since all of us, men and women, of this restless and eager generation, surrounded by forces we dimly see but cannot as yet understand, discontented with old ideas and half afraid of new, greedy for the material results of the knowledge brought to us by science but looking askance at her agnosticism as regards the soul, fearful of superstition but still more fearful of atheism, turning from the husks of outworn creeds but filled with a desperate hunger for spiritual ideals--since all of us have the same anxieties, the same griefs, the same yearning hopes, the same passionate desire for knowledge, it may well be that the story of one may help all."

Fifteen years later, and nearly twenty years after she joined the Theosophical Society, in the Preface to the third edition of her Autobiography, recounting her travels all over the world and especially in India, she emphasised that through the Theosophical Society it had been possible for her to uplift and revive the strength of the ancient religions, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism, and, in Ceylon and Burma, Buddhism. She added that her work had been not only to bring about a new self-respect. a pride in the past and a belief in the future but had been mainly educational and had consisted in the wedding of Western education with Eastern religion and Eastern ethics. She emphasised that life, to her had grown more and more intelligible and death a negligible incident in an ever-widening life. She affirmed that

her gratitude to Madame Blavastky was no longer the warm but half-blind faith of the pupil in the teacher, but glad thanks to one who had given knowledge which experience had verified.

It is not often that an autobiography is full of so many crucial incidents not only of outward experience but of inward struggle and realisation. In a memorable set of verses entitled, "The Happy Warrior", William Wordsworth thus characterised such a person:

> Who is the happy warrior? Who is he
> That every man in arms should wish to be?
> It is the generous spirit, who, when brought
> Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought
> Upon the plan that pleased his childish thought,
> Whose high endeavours are an inward light
> That makes the path before him always bright.

The words of this poem are particularly applicable and appropriate to Dr. Besant.

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I

Early Life and Spiritual Conflict

Annie Wood, as she was known till her marriage, was born on the 1st of October 1847 in London. Her mother was of pure Irish descent and her father was Irish on his mother's side though belonging to the Devonshire Woods on his father s. One of her ancestors had been Mayor of London; and her family gave England a Lord Chancellor in the person of Lord Hatherley. In essence, however, Annie Besant loved the Irish and Irish ways. She has remarked that "the Irish tongue is musical in my ear and the Irish nature dear to my heart". Another remark of hers is characteristic, namely, "Blessings on the quick tongues and warm hearts, on the people so easy to lead, so hard to drive". One of her aunts, she recounts, was very proud of her family tree and claimed descent from seven kings of France. This family descent gave her a training in reticence and the pride of honour which, in her own words, was strange preparation for her stormy public life—a much attacked and slandered life. The very pride became a shield against degradation and she says in feeling language that "however lost my public reputation, I could never bear to become sullied in my own sight".

Annie's father died of consumption when she was five years old. She says of him that, he was keenly intellectual and splendidly educated, a mathematician and a good classical scholar, a master of French, Italian, German, Spanish and Portuguese, with a smattering of Hebrew and Gaelic. It is worthy of remark, in view of her later development, that her

father, though he was a student of philosophy, was deeply and steadily sceptical. He had outgrown the orthdox beliefs of his days. Her mother was, however, deeply religious although, as she herself remarks, she put on one side as errors the doctrines of eternal punishment, vicarious atonement and the infallibility of the Bible.

Very remarkably, in her early days, Annie Besant took her religion most seriously. As her mother lay dying, she said to Annie, "My dear, you have always been too religious". As a child, Annie was mystical and imaginative, seeing visions and dreaming dreams. Sensitiveness to impressions other than physical ones was, in fact, a marked feature in the family to which she belonged. Elves and fairies were very real to them.

The childhood of Annie Besant was a period of struggle and anxiety on the part of her mother on account of financial troubles. Mrs. Wood resolved that her son should be educated in Harrow. She carried out that scheme although she was practically penniless. She kept a boarding house and maintained herself and educated her son at Harrow on the proceeds. The task of looking after Annie was taken over by Miss Marryat, a sister of the famous novelist, Captain Marryat. Miss Marryat was a born teacher and she pioneered, in many ways, the training of children on the basis of the least pain and most enjoyment to themselves—a system analogous to that evolved by Madame Montessori, who later on co-operated with Annie Besant in the educational sphere.

Annie was brought up on the borders of Devon, Miss Marryat having taken a beautiful place, Fernhill, and started a Sunday school and Bible class there. This was a time of pervasive materialism in England. It was not the philosophic materialism of the few but the religious materialism of the many. Annie's education, however, was accented on the religious side and her favourite books were *The Pilgrim's* Progress and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Curiously sensitive as she was. she says that she was pained because she could not look back

to an hour of "conversion"; that she felt that her dreamy longings were very poor things compared with the vigorous "sense of sin" spoken of by the preachers.

When Annie was fourteen years old, Miss Marryat took her to Germany after she was duly instructed in the German language for some months. She was very strictly guarded; and, as she says, "dear auntie" looked on all young men as wolves to be kept far from her growing lamb. Later on, Miss Marryat and she spent some months in Paris during the hey-day of the Empire. Annie was greatly affected by the solemn beauty of Notre Dame, La Madelaine and St. Roch. Her religious nature was deeply aroused by the colour, fragrance and pomp in the religious services, and by the picture galleries of the Louvre crowded with Madonnas and Saints. As she says, she was not allowed to read love stories and poems and her days were filled with broodings over the days when girl martyrs were blessed with visions of the King of Martyrs, when sweet St-Agnes saw her celestial Bridegroom and Agnes stopped to whisper melodies in St Cecilia's raptured ear.

On her return to England, she perfected her French and German, came back to her mother and underwent a very thorough musical education. In the meantime, her mother was seriously afflicted in many ways; she had been systematically cheated by a lawyer whom she had trusted. But all the stern realities of life were kept back from her by her loving mother who guarded and shielded the childhood and youth of Annie from every touch of pain and anxiety. During the years preceding her engagement, she concentrated on a study of the writings of the Fathers of the early Christian Church. Looking back over these years, she makes a touching and accurate observation that the keynote of her life, through all the blunders and blind mistakes and clumsy follies, has been the longing for sacrifice as against self-interest. She later on regarded and referred to this as a tendency brought over from her previous life and dominating the present one.

In 1866, she was introduced to a clergyman, Rev. Frank Besant, a young Cambridge don, whom she married after a brief courtship. Remarkably, however, at the same time that she met Frank Besant, she began to encounter many doubts as to the Christian Gospels, which she recorded in her diaries. So far as her inner life was concerned, she was still filled with passionate religious fervour, and a philosophy which she characterises as really the human passion of love transferred to an ideal. Holding this view of religion, she idealised the clergyman as a special messenger and servant of the Lord. Her engagement to Frank Besant took place within a few weeks, and, as she says, she drifted into an engagement with a man she did not pretend to love. She tried to break the engagement but her mother dissuaded her and so she married when she was 20 years of age, with no more idea of marriage relations than if she had been four years old.

In 1867, she was introduced by Mr Roberts, who was styled the "Poor Man's lawyer", to radical politics. Mr Roberts was an admirer of the great orator and politician, John Bright, who threw himself into the Irish Fenian movement. Roberts defended the Fenians but Justice Blackburn, the hanging judge as he was called, dominated the trial of the cases. Mrs Annie Besant states that her first experience of an angry crowd was on the day on which Roberts and she drove to the court. The Irishmen in the street muttered curses against the "d—d English who were going to see the boys murdered". The Jury that tried the case included a man who declared that he did not care what the evidence was but would hang every d—d Irishman of the lot. The verdict of guilty was given and the accused, Larkin and O'Brrien, were hanged.

It was in this year that Annie Besant first got to be acquainted with the work of Charles Bradlaugh and, as she says, she wrote with deep emotion the leading article dated 24th November in the *National Reformer* edited by him. It appeared under the caption "Where is our boasted English freedom?" In December

1867 commenced the crisis in Annie Besant's distressful married life. She observes : "We were an ill-mated pair, my husband and I, from the very outset; he, with very high ideas of a husband's authority and a wife's submission, precise, methodical, easily angered and with difficulty appeased; I, accustomed to freedom, indifferent to home details, impulsive, hot-tempered and proud as Lucifer." As she herself states, another kind of treatment may have turned her into a fair imitation of the proper conventional article. In the result, she lived with a wall of ice around her within which she waged mental conflicts that nearly killed her. To relieve her solitude, she began writing short stories as well as the lives of the Saints. The short stories were published and brought her a cheque which gave her intense delight as it was the first money which she had earned and the pride of earning it was added to the pride of authorship.

In 1869 a son was born and, later on in 1870, a daughter. The babies gave her a new interest and a new pleasure and she nursed them herself. In 1871 the two children got whooping cough and she states that she fought with death for her children. Once they were out of danger, Annie Besant collapsed physically and then rose, in her own language, to face a struggle which lasted for three years and two months—a struggle which transformed her from a Christian to an atheist. No one who has not felt it knows the anguish inflicted by doubt on an earnestly religious soul. The following passage from her Autobiography is significant and moving:

"It was the long months of suffering through which I had been passing, with the seemingly purposeless torturing of my little one as a climax, that struck the first stunning blow at my belief in God as a merciful Father of men. I had been visiting the poor a good deal, and had marked the patient suffering of their lives; my idolised mother had been defrauded by a lawyer she had trusted, and was plunged into debt by his non-payment of the sums that should have passed through his hands to others; my own bright life had been enshrouded by pain and rendered

to me degraded by an intolerable sense of bondage; and here was my helpless, sinless babe tortured for weeks and left frail and suffering. The smooth brightness of my previous life made the disillusionment more startling, and the sudden plunge into conditions so new and so unfavourable dazed and stunned me. My religious past became the worst enemy of the suffering present. All my personal belief in Christ, all my intense faith in His constant direction of affairs, all my habit of continual prayer and of realisation of His Presence—all were against me now. The very height of my trust was the measure of the shock when the trust gave way."

Conventional consolations and conventional prayers, at this time, seemed to be an aggravation of suffering. Her attitude led to grave quarrels between husband and wife. Her religious wretchedness increased the unhappiness of home life. But, in spite of all her outer troubles, she made up her mind to examine Christianity, to examine its dogmas, one by one, so that she could never again say "I believe" where she had no proof. The problems she dealt with were four :

(1) The eternity of punishment after death.

(2) The meaning of "goodness" and "love", as applied to a God who had made this world, with all its sin and misery.

(3) The nature of the atonement of Christ, and the "justice" of God in accepting a vicarious suffering from Christ, and vicarious righteousness from the sinner.

(4) The meaning of "inspiration" as applied to the Bible, and the possibility of reconciliation of the perfections of the Divine Author with the blunders and immoralities of the work.

She began to study heretical books including the works of Robertson, Stopford Brooke, Stanley, Greg, Matthew Arnold, Liddon, Mansel and others. She found relief from mental strain in practising social welfare work, nursing the sick and

helping the poor. She then learnt many truths regarding agricultural labour and she studied the activities of Agricultural Labour Unions which at that time, incidentally, were opposed by the farmers who gave no work to a Union man. She then came across the Rev. Charles Voysey, the atheist preacher. She began to emphasise the humanity of Christ at the expense of the divinity of Christ. She was then faced with the problem that if she gave up belief in Christ as God, she must give up Christianity as a creed. She had a brief correspondence with Dr. Pusey but was not convinced. By 1872 she came across Mr. and Mrs. Scott who made their home a centre of heretical thought and Annie Besant's Free Thought essay was written for Thomas Scott. As she remarks picturesquely, it was on the deity of Jesus of Nazareth, and was written, as she herself expresed it, by the wife of a beneficed clergyman. She thereafter declined to attend the Holy Communion and, when asked, she boldly stated that she was unable to take part honestly in the profession of faith required on the part of the communicant. It was in 1872 that, tormented as she was by her doubts and living an unhappy domestic life, she nevertheless engaged herself in strenuous nursing activity during a severe epidemic of typhoid fever in the village of Sibsey. And it was at that time that she paid a momentous visit to the Sibsey church. The idea suddenly struck her that she must preach and she felt that she could speak if she had the chance.

In her own words, "So, locked alone in the great, silent church, whither I had gone to practise some organ exercises, I ascended the pulpit steps and delivered my first lecture on the Inspiration of the Bible. I shall never forget the feeling of power and delight—but especially of power—that came upon me as I sent my voice ringing down the aisles, and the passion in me broke into balanced sentences and never paused for musical cadence or for rhythmical expression." She then knew that the gift of speech was hers—a gift that was to stand her in such good stead throughout her later life.

By 1873 the marriage tie was broken. The alternative was given by her husband: conformity or exclusion from home; in her language, hypocrisy or expulsion. Her mother was heart-broken but realised the gravity of her problem. But, as she said, she did not know then how cruel man and woman could be, how venomous their tongues. For some time, Annie Besant tried fancy needle work and she became a governess. Her children fell ill and her mother and herself set up house together. Her mother also then fell ill and her case became hopeless. Before she died, she longed for Holy Communion but she declined to take it unless her daughter Annie Besant also took it. Many clergymen would not allow Mrs Besant to communicate but Dean Stanley whom she approached permitted her to do so and she took the Sacrament for the last time. In a discussion that took place at that time beween Dean Stanley and Annie Besant, he said that conduct was far more important than theory and that he regarded all as Christians who recognised and tried to follow the moral law of Christ. Her mother died and Annie Besant, in her desperate need, engaged herself in writing pamphlets for Mr Scott. The few guineas that she earned were very valuable. Mr Scott's library was at her service and Annie Besant was feeling her way to the next stage in her life. She attended the sermons of Moncur D. Conway who directed her to the Hall of Science where Charles Bradlaugh used to speak. He told her, "Bradlaugh is the finest speaker of Saxon English except perhaps John Bright, and his power over a crowd is something marvellous. Whether you agree with him or not, you should hear him."

II

Free Thinker and Radical

It was in 1874 that Mrs. Besant joined the Free Thought Society and attended a lecture of Charles Bradlaugh. Her description of the experience is arresting:

"The grave quiet, stern, strong face, the massive head, the keen eyes, the magnificent breadth and height of forehead—was this the man I had heard described as a blatant agitator, an ignorant demagogue?

"He began quietly and simply, tracing out the resemblances between the Krishna and the Christ myths, and as he went from point to point his voice grew in force and resonance, till it rang round the hall like a trumpet. Familiar with the subject I could test the value of his treatment of it and saw that his knowledge was as sound as his language was splendid. Eloquence, fire, sarcasm, pathos, passion, all in turn were bent against Christian superstition, till the great audience, carried away by the torrent of the orator's force, hung silent, breathing soft, as he went on, till the silence that followed a magnificent peroration broke the spell, and a hurricane of cheers relieved the tension."

As Annie Besant has often stated, from the first meeting in the Hall of Science dated a friendship that lasted unbroken till death severed the earthly bond which to her stretched through Death's gateway and linked them together. Bradlaugh and she became intimate friends. He was a wonderful man and he insisted:

"You should never say you have an opinion on a subject

until you have tried to study the strongest things said against the view to which you are inclined." "You must not think you know a subject until you are acquainted with all that the best minds have said about it." "No steady work can be done in public unless the worker studies at home far more than he talks outside." "Be your own harshest judge, listen to your own speech and criticise it; read abuse of yourself and see what grains of truth are in it."

Strengthened by this friendship and fortified by Bradlaugh's example, Mrs. Besant progressed from stage to stage; and in a chapter in her Autobiography entitled "Atheism as I knew and Taught It", she says:

"Proceeding to search whether any idea of God was attainable, I came to the conclusion that evidence of the existence of a conscious Power was lacking and that the ordinary proofs offered were inconclusive; that we could grasp phenomena and no more.

"The Atheist neither affirms nor denies the possibility of phenomena differing from those recognised by human experience.... As his knowledge of the universe is extremely limited and very imperfect the Atheist declines either to deny or to affirm anything with regard to modes of existence of which he knows nothing. Further, he refuses to believe anything concerning that of which he knows nothing and affirms that that which can never be the subject of knowledge ought never to be the object of belief."

She adds: "For many of us evidence must precede belief. I would gladly believe in a happy immortality for all, as I would gladly believe that all misery and crime and poverty will disappear in 1885—if I could. But I am unable to believe an improbable proposition unless convincing evidence is brought in support of it. Immortality is most improbable; no evidence is brought foward in its favour. I cannot believe only because I wish."

Holding these views, it must, at the same time, be realised,

she was filled with a passionate desire for the bettering of the world and the elevation of humanity. To her, therefore, a lofty system of ethics as of much greater importance than a logical, intellectual conception of the universe. In her own language, "the total loss of faith in a righteous God only made me more strenuously assertive of the binding nature of duty and the overwhelming importance of conduct". It seemed to her, as she asserts in her book *The True Basis of Morality*:

"To the forwarding of this moral growth of man two things seemed to me necessary—an ideal which should stir the emotions and impel to action and a clear understanding of the sources of evil and of the methods by which they might be drained. Into the drawing of the first I threw all the passion of my nature striving to paint the ideal in colours which should enthral and fascinate, so that love and desire to realise might stir man to effort. If 'morality touched by emotion' be religion, then truely was I the most religious of Atheists, finding in this dwelling on and glorifying of the ideal full satisfaction for the loftiest emotions."

She had an instinctive certainty of man's innate grandeur that governed all her thought, inconsistent as that certainty was with her belief in his purely animal ancestry. The *Gospel of Atheism* was published in 1876 and the *Gospel of Christianity and Free Thought* about the same time. She began to study Darwin, Herbert Spencer and Huxley, Buchner and Haeckel and she began to see in the evaluation of the social instinct the explanation of the growth of conscience and of the strengthening of man's mental and moral nature. In her own words:

"The Atheist desires personal perfection not only for his joy in it as beautiful in itself, but because science has taught him the unity of the race, and he knows that each fresh conquest of his over the baser parts of his nature and each strengthening of the higher is a gain for all and not for himself alone."

This was her creed of ethics and conduct from 1874 to

1886. Later on she was to assert that the chief debt of gratitude she owed to Free Thought was that it left her mind open to new truths and encouraged the most unshrinking questions. She worked side by side with Charles Bradlaugh; and, gradually but definitely, great public antagonism grew up against them. Many persons believed that atheism implied degraded morality. Accusations were made against Mrs. Besant of personal immorality and, as she says, her extreme political views combined with her atheism engendered a pervasive feeling of hatred. She began to speak in public on the land question, the cost to the country of the Royal family, the obstructive power of the House of Lords; and she advocated complete Home Rule in colonial countries, and she also spoke against the Government policy in Ireland, in Transvaal, in Burma, in Egypt and, later on, in India. Bradlaugh and she worked against capital punishment and against flogging and they demanded a national system of education and of public libraries. She has described her joint work with Bradlaugh in these words:

"For many years he was wont to come to my house in the morning after the hours always set aside by him for receiving poor men who wanted advice on legal and other matters—for he was a veritable poor man's lawyer, always ready to help and counsel—and, bringing his books and papers he would sit writing, hour after hour, I equally busy with my own work, now and then, perhaps, exchanging a word, breaking off just for lunch and dinner, and working on again in the evening till about ten o'clock—he always went early to bed when at home—he would take himself off again to his lodging about three-quarters of a mile away."

Mrs. Besant accepted a place on the staff of the *Nationa Reformer* newspaper and was paid a weekly salary of a guinea. She began to write under the *non-de-plume* "Ajax". She says that her first attempt at public speaking was in an informal debate at a garden party. Her first lecture was given at the Co-opertive Institute in 1874. She selected as her theme "The

Political Status of Women". Though she was nervous to start with she says that the moment she was on her feet and was looking at the faces before her she felt no tremor or nervousness and as she heard her own voice ring out, she was conscious of power and pleasure and not of fear. Once on her feet, she felt perfectly at ease and was, in her own language, "ruler of the crowd, master of myself".

It was about this time that Bradlaugh, with the support of John Stuart Mill, stood for Parliament, his constituency being Northampton. Mrs. Besant took part in the electioneering. The electiton gave her the first experience of rioting. Bradlaugh was accused of all un-nameable vices. It was known that he was separated from his wife and it was alleged that, being an atheist, he was an opponent of marriage and had deserted his wife and children. He could have easily defended himself as it could be proved that his wife had given way to drink and her habits were the cause of the break-up of the home; but he would say nothing. Public feeling was aroused against him; and, during the election, the crowd charged the door of a house where he was sitting. There were, however, many defenders of Bradlaugh and it is remarkable that although he was often attacked, he equally often rescued those who had maligned him from being manhandled by his followers.

From 1875 Mrs. Besant started her career as lecturer on Free Thought and undertook lecture tours. She says that lecturing acted as a tonic. She consulted a doctor on the possibility of her being able to stand on a platform and speak. The answer was, "It will cure you or kill you", and she says that it cured her and she grew strong and vigorous. During her tours, she was subjected to many attacks. She was accused of being in favour of the abolition of marriage. She was falsely denounced as the author of the book *The Bible of Secularists*. The fact was that it had been written by a Doctor of Medicine some years before, and sent to the *National Reformer* for review, as to other journals, in the ordinary course of business. It con-

sisted of three parts—the first advocated, from the standpoint of medical science, what is roughly known as "Free Love"; the second was entirely medical; the third consisted of a clear and able exposition of the law of population as laid down by the Rev. Mr. Malthus, and following the lines of John Stuart Mill the book insisted that it was the duty of married persons voluntarily to limit their families within their means of subsistence. Mr. Bradlaugh in reviewing the book, said that it was written "with honest and pure intent and purpose", and recommended to working men its exposition of the law of population. His enemies took hold of this recommendation, declared that he shared the author's views on the impermanence of the marriage tie, and despite his reiterated contradictions, they used extracts against marriage from the book as containing his views.

The National Secular Society was founded about this time. Bradlaugh was its President and Mrs. Besant was the Vice-President. She continued as such until she joined the Theosophical Society.

Once a year the Society met in conference; and many a strong and lasting friendship between men and women living far apart from each other dated from those yearly gatherings, so that all over the country spread a network of comradeship among the staunch followers of "our Charlie", as Bradlaugh used to be called. These were the men and women who paid his election expenses over and over again, supported him in his parliamentary struggle, came up to London to swell the demonstration in his favour. And round them grew up a huge party—"the largest personal following of any public man since Mr. Gladstone", as was once said by an eminent man (who differed from him in theology, but passionately supported him in politics). Miners, cutlers, weavers, spinners, shoe-makers, operatives of every trade, strong, sturdy, self-reliant men enthusiastically followed and loved him.

In 1835, Dr. Charles Knowlton who was a follower of the teachings of the Rev. Mr. Malthus came to the conclusion that

married people should be taught to limit their families within their means of livelihood. He was the first exponent of what is now called "family planning". This book had been sold for forty years. It was essentially a physiological work and it advocated conjugal prudence and parental responsibility. The book was never challenged until a very disreputable Bristol bookseller began to sell copies of this book to which he added some indecent and obscene pictures. He was prosecuted and he pleaded guilty and was convicted. It was at this stage that Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant, after careful deliberation, decided to publish the pamphlet in order to test the right of free discussion on the population question. They knew the risk that they took, but as Mrs. Besant stated:

"We republish this pamphlet, honestly believing that on all questions affecting the happiness of the people, whether they be theological, political, or social, the fullest right of free discussion ought to be maintained at all hazards. We do not personally endorse all that Dr. Knowlton says; his 'Philosophical Poem' seems to us full of philosophical mistakes, and—as we are neither of us doctors—we are not prepared to endorse his medical views; but since progress can only be made through discussion, and no discussion is possible where differing opinions are suppressed, we claim the right to publish all opinions, so that the public, enabled to see all sides of a question, may have the materials for forming a sound judgement."

To Bradlaugh this step meant the almost certain destruction of his parliamentary position. To Mrs Besant, it meant obloquy and scandal; but it was characteristic of both of them that the day prior to the pamphlet being put on sale, copies were delivered by them at the Guild Hall and to the officers of the City Police. Letters of approval came from Giuseppe Garibaldi and a great French constitutional lawyer, and even from clergymen's wives. But the law had to take its course; and both Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant were arrested. Their trial commenced before the Lord Chief Justice of England

and a special jury. As often happened later, Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant defended themselves. The Lord Chief Justice summed up strongly for an acquittal and made statements praising the straightforwardness and courage that animated Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant. Everyone in the court thought that the case was won but religious and political hatred against them made the jury come to the conclusion that the book was calculated to deprave public morals. The jury, however, exonerated them from corrupt motives. A sentence of six months' imprisonment and a fine of two hundred pounds was passed. Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant moved for a writ of error and the sentence was quashed. Thereafter, Mrs. Besant wrote a pamphlet on *The Law of Population.*

Thereupon, an attempt was made to deprive Mrs. Besant of the custody of her children; and in 1879 the High Court of Chancery was moved in the matter. The petition came up for hearing before Sir George Jessel, M. R., a man whom Mrs. Besant characterises as follows: "A man animated by the old spirit of Hebrew bigotry, to which he had added the time-serving morality of a 'man of the world', sceptical as to all sincerity, and contemptuous of all devotion to an unpopular cause."

Mrs. Besant was deprived of the custody of her children. Her health broke down but she took steps to set aside the order. The Court of Appeal upheld in 1879 the absolute right of the father but allowed her the right of access to the child. As Mrs. Besant says: "This ignoring of all right to her children on the part of the married mother is a scandal and a wrong that has since been redressed by Parliament."

Anyhow, apart from these domestic tragedies, the position taken up by Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant in the Knowlton pamphlet was fully appreciated by the public, and from 1893, even Christian magazines began to speak in favour of the right and duty of voluntary limitation of the family.

Notwithstanding the victimisation of persons like Truelove

who advocated the Malthusian doctrines, one of the by-products of the prosecution was a great agitation throughout the United Kingdom and a wide popularisation of Malthusian views.

Before leaving this topic, it may be worthy of note that after Mrs. Besant came under the compelling influence of Madame Blavatsky and joined the Theosophical Society, she gave up working for the doctrines for which she had sacrificed so much. She accepted the doctrine of Madame Blavatsky that theosophists should only exercise self-restraint and use no other means for checking population. In the result, as she says, though she shrank from the decision, she refused to re-print *The Law of Population* or to sell the copyright. This gave great pain to many friends who had stood by her so valiantly: as she exclaimed, "will it always be, I wonder, in man's climbing upward, that every step must be set on his own heart and on the hearts of those he loves?" About this time, Mrs. Besant had suffered from a long and dangerous ill-ness but she returned to her work with zeal both with reference to her Free Thought publications and the struggle against the Disraeli Government's policies. She wrote in 1878, a book which ought to be better known than it is, entitled England, *India and Afghanistan.* In it she anticipated her later pleas for Home Rule for India and against Imperialist expansion.

It was characteristic of Mrs. Besant that, about this time, she took to the resolute study of science in co-operation with Dr. Aveling who wrote popular scientific articles for the *National Reformer* and she also joined the University of London as a student of science. In the same year, namely, 1879, she pleaded her case for the custody of her daughter in the Court of Appeal; and in the midst of those court proceedings she turned for relief to Algebra, Geometry and Physics. After she gained her case, Mr. Bradlaugh wrote in the *National Reformer* that the case was won with a pleading unequalled in any case on record for the boldness of its affirmation of free thought. She qualified as a science teacher· she appeared for the B.Sc.

examination of the London University but there were attempts to prevent her studying in the University and she was, in fact, denied permission even to visit the Botanical Gardens in Regent's Park. Side by side with all these pursuits, along with Herbert Burrows, she arranged for a London Convention on Land Law Reform.

In the midst of these activities commenced Mr. Bradlaugh's protracted parliamentary battle. He was elected to Parliament along with Labouchere. The people at large were with Mr. Bradlaugh but bigoted opponents tried to prevent his taking his seat in Parliament. When he proceeded to the House of Commons, he pleaded that he should be allowed to make solemn affirmation instead of the oath. A Committee was appointed to go into the matter and he was heard at the Bar of the House. He made a speech which, in the language of Mrs. Besant, was so self-restrained, so noble and so dignified that the House, in defiance of its own rule, broke out into applause. In spite of all his eloquence, religious intolerance prevailed and the House voted that he should not be allowed to make his affirmation. Having heard the decision, Mr. Bradlaugh stated that he respectfully refused to obey the order because it was against the law. The Sergeant-at-arms was asked to remove him. With reference to this incident, Mrs. Besant wrote a pamphlet, which was very widely circulated, entitled *Law-makers and Law-breakers*. Huge crowds gathered and protested against the decision of the House of Commons. In less than a week 200 meetings of protest had been held. The House rescinded its resolution but Tories and bigots carried this up to the law courts. As soon as Mr. Bradlaugh had taken his seat, he was served with a writ for having voted without taking the requisite oath. In 1881 the Court of Appeal decided against Mr. Bradlaugh and declared his seat vacant. He was again re-elected. Mr. Gladstone promised to bring in an Affirmation Bill but he could not proceed with it on account of opposition. Thereupon, Mr. Bradlaugh decided to present him-

self before the House to assert his rights. The House was guarded by police. The great gates of the House of Commons were closed and throughout the month of July the same state of affairs continued. Huge meetings were held all over the country and a specially remarkable one was convened at Trafalgar Square at which many delegates were present from all parts of England and Scotland. On the 3rd of August 1880, Mr. Bradlaugh took Mrs. Besant with him to the House with this injunction which Mrs. Besant was to repeat emphatically several years later in connection with the non-co-operation movement in India: "Whatever happens, mind, let people do no violence. I trust you to keep them quiet." Mr. Bradlaugh went to the House of Commons. The police disliked their work. The crowd grew and grew and they wanted to break into the House crying "justice, justice". When the police held the door against the crowd that surged up, Mrs. Besant threw herself between the crowd and the police, and charged the crowd to stop for the sake of Bradlaugh. The men drew back, though one of them said, "If you had let us go, we would have carried him into the House up to the Speaker's Chair". Bradlaugh was expelled with the assitance of ten men. The strong, broad, heavy, powerful frame of Mr. Bradlaugh was hard to move with its every nerve and muscle strained to resist the coercion. They flung him out. For weeks, Mr. Bradlaugh's arms had to be kept in bandages, but, nevertheless, as he was removed from the House, he emphasised that there should be no riots and no disorder. There was a continued agitation throughout the country. A petition bearing a quarter million signatures was presented to the House. In May 1882 Mrs. Besant wrote that Charles Bradlaugh was a man who, by the infliction on him of a great wrong, had become the incarnation of a great principle Ultimately, the agitation grew in intensity. and Mr. Bradlaugh who was returned again at the general election, finally took his seat in Parliament. He brought in and carried an Oaths Bill not only giving Members of Parlia-

ment the right to affirm but making free thinkers competent as jurymen and witnesses.

Very soon after this fight was over, Mrs. Besant took up the fight against the Coercion Act in Ireland and the eviction of tenants. She wrote at length, sketching the misery of the peasant in the grip of the absentee landlord.

In the midst of all these turmoils came the first contact of Mrs. Besant with theosophy. Col. Olcott and Madame Blavatsky had outlined a statement of its principles. And it is noteworthy that in an article written in 1882, Mrs. Besant had stated as follows: "The Theosophical Society has no definite ideas of the requirements for membership beyond a dreamy, emotional, scholarly interest in the religio-philosophic fancies of the past." Madame Blavatsky replied paying a tribute to a highly intellectual person who had suffered at the hands of blind bigotry in her life-long struggle for freedom of thought. It is symptomatic of the wide range of Mrs. Besant's intellectual interests that when all these events were taking place, she was able to take the Honours Degree in Botany in the London University being the only student in all England who had achieved that distinction. She also protested strongly in public meetings against England's policy towards Egypt. In the meantime, the publishing business of the Free Thought Movement was enlarged and, in the socialistic and labour work which was started about this time, she participated along with men like Bernard Shaw, Dr. Aveling, Moncure D. Conway, Prof. Ludwig Buchner, Yves Guyot, Prof. Haeckel and others.

It was in 1883 that the legal troubles of Mr. Bradlaugh ended and he won complete victory when the House of Lords gave a judgment in his favour. In the course of the trial, Mrs. Besant as a witness and Mr. Bradlaugh as a party demonstrated their legal acumen and their persuasive eloquence. Mrs. Besant paid a remarkable tribute to Lord Coleridge whose judgment was the leading one: "Nothing more touching could be imagined than the conflict between the real religious feeling,

abhorrent of heresy, and the determination to be just despite all prejudice." As the *Pall Mall Gazette* wrote at that time, not even the bitterest opponent of Bradlaugh can deny the brilliance of the series of victories which he won.

By this time, the reputation both of Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant spread to the continent of Europe. A great international Congress at Amsterdam and another gathering at Venice began to arouse the interest of Mrs. Besant in socialism. She met Mr. Hyndman whom she characterised as one of the most self-sacrificing advocates of socialism. It was curious that the early socialists were very antagonistic to Bradlaugh and it was Mr. Hyndman who acted as a reconciler. Mrs. Besant, at the same time, met George Bernard Shaw whom she described as one of the most brilliant of socialist writers and most provoking of men. Contributing to the *Annie Besant Centenary Book* published in 1947, George Bernard Shaw says : "Mrs. Besant is a woman of swift decisions. She sampled many movements and societies before she finally found herself; and her transitions were not gradual; she always came into a movement with a bound." He describes Mrs. Besant at the time of her entry into socialism as the greatest orator in England and possibly in Europe. He adds : "I have never heard her excelled. She was then unapproached.

Gradually she united her efforts with those of leading social reformers, and devoted herself to the amelioration of the social condition of the people. She started by protesting against Sir John Lubbock's Bill which had fixed a twelve-hour day for a young person's toil. She began to urge the free feeding of Board school children with reference to which a controversy arose with one W. P. Ball. She began to write a series of articles on the re-distribution of political power, on the evolution of society and modern socialism. She studied and described the slums in Edinburgh and elsewhere. She strove, in her own language, "to sound in the ears of the thoughtless and the careless the cry of the sufferings of the

poor....Passing out of the slums into the streets of the town, only a few steps separating the horror and the beauty, I felt, with a vividness more intense than ever, the fearful contrasts between the lots of men; and with more pressing urgency the question seemed to ring in my ears, 'Is there no remedy? Must there always be rich and poor?' Some say that it must be so; that the palace and the slum will for ever exist as the light and the shadow. Not so do I believe. I believe that the poverty is the result of ignorance and of bad social arrangements, and that therefore it may be eradicated by knowledge and by social change."

Mrs. Pethick Lawrence who, along with her husband, had always stood by Dr. Besant in her work both in England and later on in India, speaks thus :

"Annie Besant, whom I was privileged to know personally, is one of the outstanding pioneers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There are three big Movements which I have had at heart, of which she was a leader. I remember her in the early days of the Trade Union Movement, and in particular I remember her grand championship of the match girls when they went on strike.

"I value the memory of her comradeship in the struggle in our country to secure equal citizen rights for women. I remember that in 1910 she marched in our great procession from the London Embankment to the Royal Albert Hall, and spoke from the platform with her own matchless oratory.

"Above all, she stands highest in my estimation because she was one of the great influences that changed public opinion and won British support for the conception of a free and independent India."

To this account may be added the tribute paid to Mrs. Besant by Mr. W. T. Stead, the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and later of the *Review of Reviews.* Writing in 1891, he makes the following remarks which surely give a truer picture than what Mr. Nethercot offers in his recent remarkable but

one-sided biography :

"Annie Besant is now (1891), as she has been for the last four or five years, one of my most intimate friends. I had not the privilege of knowing her in her earliest phase, either of school-girl Evangelicalism or of young-woman Puseyism, but I knew her as Materialist and Atheist. I know her as Theosophist, and whatever development she may pass through will in no way affect the sentiment of affectionate admiration with which I regard her. She is one of the three remarkable women of the apostolic type of this generation. Mrs. Booth, Mrs. Butter and Mrs Besant constitute a remarkable trio of propagandists militant, whose zeal, energy and enthusiasm have left a deep impress upon our time. Of the three, Mrs. Besant is the youngest, having been born in 1847; and as she is not yet five-and-forty she may live to take her seat, together with Mrs. Fawcett, in the House of Commons. Mrs. Booth is no longer with us. Mrs. Butler, although a widow, stricken in years and afflicted, still tends the sacred fire which she has kindled in the hearts of men. But Mrs. Besant is the only one of the three who is still in her prime, whose last words have not yet been spoken, and whose ultimate development is still unknown. Last month her name was in every mouth, and the papers were filled with endless letters discussing the latest phase of her progress in search of truth. Next month she is to start for India, not only as a pilgrim from the West to the shrines sacred to the wisdom of the East, but as a missionary and propagandist of the faith which had Madame Blavatsky as its most conspicuous seer. The other day she was presiding over a Socialist Congress in Paris, next year no one can say where she will be or what she will be doing except that, whatever she may do or wherever she may go, one thing only is quite certain, she will be animated by a passionate love and sympathy for the poor and oppressed and she will command the enthusiastic affection of all those who come near enough to her to know her as she really is.

"Yet Mrs. Besant, one of the half-dozen women who have stamped the impress of their strong and vivid personality upon their own time, is one to whom, until but the other day, it was considered hardly correct to allude, except in the most distant manner, as if she inhabited another and improper world. When I started this *Review* I had to put my foot down, before the first number saw the light, on an attempt to enforce even in these pages the policy of boycott that still prevails in certain obscure quarters. Mrs. Besant had written me a cordial little note welcoming the new *Review* which was inserted among the other letters which I received from the eminent men and women of the day. The business side of the *Review* remonstrated. 'Was very sorry, you know, really. Great regard for Mrs. Besant, but business is business, and it would never do, and especially in the first number, to parade her name. Couldn't Mr. Stead leave it over till February?' To which the editorial side replied as might be expected, only to elicit the further protest: 'Well, of course, if you will, you must; but remember that name will cost us hundreds of subscribers. There are scores of clergymen who will never allow the *Review* to enter their doors if Mrs. Besant's name appears in its columns.' That may or may not be true. If it is, so much the worse for the clergymen in question. Of course her letter went in. But the protest was interesting as illustrating the kind of prejudice which has existed about Mrs. Besant.

"It may be that even now some readers may have so little entered into the spirit with which every page of this magazine has been written since that first summary overruling of the protests against the publication of her letter as to object to the selection of Mrs. Besant as the subject of this Character Sketch. All that I need say to them is, whether they be many or few, that when they have made a tithe of her sacrifices for conscience sake they may be in a position to criticize. Until then they will do well to be silent and endeavour, if they can, to catch a little of her spirit. Most of those who sneer at her as if she were

disreputable, or shrug their shoulders when her name is mentioned, might then perhaps come to be numbered among those who are worthy to unloose the latchet of her shoe.

"One result of the persistent boycott that has been maintained against her so long by the papers is that one of the most charming and pathetic autobiographical sketches in our language is practically non-existent for the great mass of the English-speaking public. Mrs Besant s fragmentary sketches of her spiritual pilgrimage, although published in 1885, are, I suppose, almost unknown to my readers. The book is out of print, and they will therefore be grateful for the extracts which I shall make freely from its pages. I hope, now the ice has been broken and the great slowminded public has wakened up at last to the fact that Mrs Besant is one of the most remarkable women of our time, she will re-publish it, with an additional chapter describing the later stages of her pilgrim's progress. An authentic narrative of the soul-journeyings of an intensely religious soul from Evangelicalism to Puseyism and thence through Broad Church Theism to the flat negations of an Atheistic Materialism, out of which she has emerged, by way of Spiritualism, into the realm of Theosophy, is one for which we may search in vain in contemporary religious biography. Such a story could not fail to be full of suggestion in any case, even if the writer were obscure and unknown. How much more interesting, then, must it be when it reaches us from one of the most eloquent of living women, who is still in the zenith of her powers."

An estimate of Mrs Besant's life and work at this time is also contained in an article produced by the great Labour leader, George Lansbury, who played a prominent part in English public life and was in the Labour Cabinet of 1924:

"In all the work I have known her engaged in, Mrs Besant has always been in the very forefront of the Reform movement. She has never occupied the half-way house, but always stood for the truth—the whole truth—and has invited her followers

to follow the star wherever it might lead them.

"To write fully about her activities in the social and political life of Britain would be to write almost in full the story of social and political change from 1874 to the time she left for India. There was no movement in which she did not take a prominent and distinctive part and all through her long stay in India her interest in great social and political questions never died down. Witness her speeches on behalf of Woman Suffrage in England during 1913 and 1914 and her action during the building trade lock-out of those years. I have heard her lecture to great audiences in the Hall of Science and in St James' Hall; heard her address mass meetings in the London parks and in Trafalgar Square and at all these gatherings she dealt with live questions of the day. It is interesting to recall the fact that her first public lecture dealt with 'The Political Status of Women'. All through her career she has stood for equality of rights and duties for all men and all women. In the late seventies, when the Russo-Turkish struggle threatened to plunge Great Britain into war, she took her stand with those Radicals who, with the late Mr Gladstone, strove hard to prevent the criminal folly of Lord Beaconsfield and his colleagues, who, in defence of what they imagined were British interests, rivetted for a generation the Turkish yoke on the Balkan States. Those who struggled against that policy have been more than justified by later events. Mrs Besant and those who worked with her understood that neither the victory of Russian autocracy nor the perpetuation of Turkish misrule would solve the problems connected with South-Eastern Europe; that only the recognition of the rights of small people to live their own lives and manage their own affairs could bring peace and contentment to the world. During these years she also championed the cause of India. In 1878 she published a book, *England, India and Afghanistan.* In this book she exposed the misgovernment of India and the folly of the Imperialist policy of Lord Beaconsfield as applied to that country and its neighbours in Afghanistan. In 1880-1881 she

threw herself whole-heartedly into the struggle waged by Charles Bradlaugh to maintain his right to sit in Parliament without offending his conscience by taking the Oath of Allegiance in such a form as to have no binding effect. She took a leading part in the Irish Home Rule agitation, mainly in order to secure better conditions of life for the people of Ireland. She was a leading speaker and agitator for the starving East-End dockers and the unemployed. During these agitations she came very near to actual conflict with the police of the Metropolis. In her Autobiography she tells the story of the huge crowd of men who, on August 2, 1881, but for her restraining influence, would have rushed Palace Yard when Charles Bradlaugh was flung with ignominy out of the House of Commons and again, on that Sunday in Trafalgar Square, afterwards christened Bloody Sunday, when as if bearing a charmed life she, unarmed and alone, marched through the cordons of soldiers and police in her determination to vindicate the right of Free Speech in London's Forum. I was amongst the crowd on both occasions and know what we all thought of her for her courage and devotion.

"She did another piece of work which had far-reaching results. Public work and public contracts in her days on the School Board were always carried out on the old Manchester principle of 'buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market'. Workmen employed directly or indirectly by Municipal or Government departments were often worked long hours and paid scandalously low wages. Goods purchased by these authorities often came from workshops in which sweating conditions of the worst description prevailed. Mrs Besant cut right across all these practices by inducing the London School Board to insert in all its contracts a clause that all goods should be produced under Trade Union conditions so far as rates of pay and hours of labour are concerned. The effect of this resolution was electric throughout the world of labour. Everywhere an agitation was set on foot to secure that all Government and Muni-

cipal contracts should contain such a clause and although we did not secure all we hoped for, yet the great Municipalities and the Government have all adopted the resolution in such a form as ensures that, whether there is a Trade Union or not, a standard rate of pay and hours of labour shall prevail.

"And when, at the call of liberty and freedom, she ranged herself alongside the people of India in their struggle for freedom, and when as a sign of confidence in her and trust in her ability and capacity to lead them, the people of India elected her as President of the National Congress, she only did as she had done all through her life, stand by those who need a friend, giving her experience, her energy, her wonderful powerful tongue and pen to those who are crushed in the struggle of life. Long ago here in London, in 1885 a meeting was held at her house to form a Society of Friends of Russia, to help the exiles from Russia. Kropotkin and Stepniak were present, and I believe from this Society grew up, under the help and guidance of Dr Spence Watson, the society called the Society of Friends of Russian Freedom. When the Russian people at long last approached their goal, Mrs Besant like many more British Socialists joined in the shout of victory, and when Ireland and India take their place as nations with other nations of the world she will join in the triumph, too. for her fight for freedom has been worldwide, for all people. Those who are members of the Theosophical Society must and will, I feel sure, respond to her call, that freedom cannot be confined to one race, but must be free to all; that the colour bar must not be a bar to brotherhood and that brotherhood must mean that my brother's welfare is my welfare."

Mrs Besant joined the Fabian Society in 1885 and worked hard as a speaker and lecturer on its behalf, her colleagues being Sidney Webb, G. Bernard Shaw, Mr and Mrs Bland and Graham Wallas. They lectured at Workmen's Clubs and spread ideas of sound economics in an effort to turn the workers' energy towards social in preference even to political reforms.

In her own language, that the London working classes today are so largely socialistic is greatly due to the years of work done among them by members of the Fabian Society and to the devotion of that noble and generous genius, William Morris. In the same year, she drew attention to the sufferings of the Russian political prisoners. She fought against the opposition of the police authorities to public speaking by socialist spokesmen and, gradually, public opinion changed. Herbert Burrows, a social worker, stood for the London School Board and, in spite of opposition, won by a large majority. Mrs Besant herself succeeded in getting into the School Board in 1888. For the first time, a great conference was organised for the discussion of the prevalent commercial system and the better utilisation of national wealth for the benefit of the community. Men like Edward Carpenter, William Morris, Sidney Webb and John Roberts joined her in this fight. As in the case of Free Thought, so in regard to socialism, Mrs Besant was bitterly attacked. She was called a Saint Athanasius in petticoats. It was asserted that like most women, she was at the mercy of her last male acquaintance for her views on economics. She defended herself fiercely, but later on, in her Autobiography, blames herself for this defence. Not yet had come the self-control that estimates the judgments of others at their true value, that recks not of praise and blame; not yet had I learned that evil should not be met with evil, wrath with wrath."

An agitation for an eight-hour day and a great movement against unemployment occupied her in 1887 until another psychological crisis occurred in her career. Foreshadowing all that she pleaded for and did much later, she started a Charing Cross Parliament and many socialistic debates took place in that Parliament. The *National Reformer* of which she had been co-Editor and a part proprietor found itself in the midst of divided loyalties. The editorial policy of the journal on socialism was a divided policy and rather than continue in that position, she resigned her joint editorship. Charles Bradlaugh

expressed real grief over the severance of her relationship with the paper in which she had rendered enormous service to the Free Thought and Radical causes. As Mrs Besant declared, it was a wrench, this breaking of a tie for which a heavy price had been paid 13 years ago, but it had to be. Thereafter she devoted herself whole-heartedly to the cause of socialism. Gradually her tie with Bradlaugh was also broken. In a moving passage, she describes this process as follows:

"I saw the swift turning of public opinion, the gradual approach to him among Liberals who had hitherto held aloof, and I knew that they looked upon me as a clog and a burden and they thought that were I less prominently with him, his way would be the easier to tread. So I slipped more and more into the background, no longer went with him to his meetings; my use to him in public was over, for I had become a hindrance instead of a help."

The unemployed began walking in procession through the streets. Harshness on the part of the police led to riots. Then came the closing of Trafalgar Square. Mrs Besant decided to march a procession to the Square and, being challenged by the police, it broke up after a formal protest. As the procession re-started, the police made a rush with uplifted truncheons. Mrs. Besant, Cunninghame Graham and John Burns, who afterwards became a Cabinet Minister, were attacked. The cavalry came up and several injuries were inflicted and as Mrs. Besant observes: "Peaceable, law-abiding workmen who had never dreamed of rioting, were left with broken legs, broken arms, wounds of every description." At this time Mr Bradlaugh, who differed in policy from Mrs. Besant, wrote as follows:

"As I have on most serious matters of principle recently differed very widely from my brave and loyal co-worker, and as the difference has been regrettably emphasised by her resignation of her editorial functions on her Journal, it is the more necessary that I should say how thoroughly I approved, and how grateful I am to her for her conduct in not only obtaining bail and providing legal assistance for the helpless unfortunates in the hands

of the police, but also for her daily personal attendance and wise conduct at the police-stations and police-courts, where she had done so much to abate harsh treatment on the one hand and rash folly on the other."

Public indignation grew and the police were silently boycotted until a change of policy took place.

We now come to 1888. By that time, Mr. William Stead and Mrs. Besant had become close friends—he a christian and she an atheist, but both burning with one common love for man one common hatred against oppression. Mr. Stead was the Editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and owing to his influence and that of the Rev. S. D. Headlam, she wrote in favour of founding a new Brotherhood in which service of man should take the place of the erstwhile service of God. It will thus be seen that she was unconsciously marching towards her next destination in life. In pursuance of her ideas, a weekly newspaper was projected called *Link*. Its motto was, "The people are silent. I will be the advocate of the silent. I will speak for the dumb. I will speak of the small to the great and of the feeble to the strong." Week after week the injustices suffered by the poor found a voice. Starvation wages paid to women were exposed. The sweating of labour was denounced. In the course of the crusade for the poor, Mrs Besant worked for the dockers, worked for children's free dinners and the child martyrs of the slums. At a meeting of the Fabian Society, a lecture was delivered by Miss Black in which she urged the formation of a Consumers' League. Unfair wages and illegal deductions from labourers' wages were protested against. A Match Makers' Union was formed; and Mrs Besant, Sideny Webb and others led a procession of match makers to the House of Commons. The London Trades Council consented to act as arbitrators in the matter. For years, Mrs Besant acted as the Secretary of this Trade Union which was, for a long time, the strongest women's Trade Union in England. It is worthy of remark, at this juncture, that Madame Blavatsky founded a Working Women's Club in London.

III

Theosophy

About this period there opened a completely different chapter in Mrs Besant's life. A profound change of mental outlook and psychological approach took place. Ever since 1886, she had been feeling that her philosophy of life was not sufficient. She says:

"Psychology was advancing with rapid strides; hypnotic experiments were revealing unlooked-for complexities in human consciousness, strange riddles of multiplex personalities, and most startling of all, vivid intensities of mental action when the brain, that should be the generator of thought, was reduced to a comatose state. Fact after fact came hurtling in upon me, demanding explanations that I was incompetent to give. I studied the obscurer sides of consciousness, dreams hallucinations, illusions, insanity. Into the darkness shot a ray of light—A. P. Sinnett's *Occult World,* with its wonderfully suggestive letters, expounding not the supernatural but a nature under law, wider than I had dared to conceive. I added Spiritualism to my studies, experimenting privately, finding the phenomena indubitable, but the spiritualistic explanation of them incredible. The phenomena of clairvoyance, clairaudience and thought-reading were found to be real. Under all the rush of the outer life, already sketched, these questions were working in my mind, their answers were being diligently sought. I read a variety of books but could find little in them that satisfied me. I experimented in various ways suggested in them, and got some (to me) curious results. I finally convinced myself that there was some hidden thing, some

hidden power, and resolved to seek until I found, and by the early spring of 1889 I had grown desperately determined to find at all hazards what I sought. At last, sitting alone in deep thought as I had become accustomed to do after the sun had set, filled with an intense but nearly hopeless longing to solve the riddle of life and mind, I heard a Voice that was later to become to me the holiest sound on earth, bidding me take courage for the light was near. A fortnight passed, and then Mr. Stead gave into my hands two large volumes. 'Can you review these? My young men all fight shy of them, but you are quite mad enough on these subjects to make something of them.' I took the books; they were the two volumes of *The Secret Doctrine,* written by H. P. Blavatsky.

"As I turned over page after page the interest became absorbing; but how familiar it seemed; how my mind leapt forward to presage the conclusions, how natural it was, how coherent, how subtle, and yet how intelligible. I was dazzled, blinded by the light in which disjoined facts were seen as parts of a mighty whole, and all my puzzles, riddles, problems, seemed to disappear. The effect was partially illusory in one sense in that they all had to be slowly unravelled later, the brain gradually assimilating that which the swift intuition had grasped as truth. But the light had been, and in that flash of illumination I knew that the weary search was over and the very Truth was found."

Mrs Besant wrote the suggested review and asked Mr Stead for an introduction to the writer. She called on Madame Blavatsky, "a figure in a large chair before a table, a voice vibrant, compelling, that said 'My dear Mrs Besant, I have so long wished to see you and I was standing with my hand in her firm grip, and looking for the first time, in this life, straight in to the eyes of H. P. B.".

But before Mrs Besant joined the Theosophical Society, she tried hard to fight against it. She had largely conquered public prejudice by her great work on the London School Board. She had now to plunge into a new vortex of the strife and make

herself a mark for ridicule.

She asked herself: "Must I turn against Materialism, and face the shame of publicly confessing that I had been wrong, misled by intellect to ignore the Soul? Must I leave the army that had battled for me so bravely, the friends who through all brutality of social ostracism had held me dear and true? And he, the strongest and truest friend of all, whose confidence I had shaken by my Socialism—must he suffer the pang of seeing his co-worker, his co-fighter, of whom he had been so proud, to whom he had been so generous, go over to the opposing hosts, and leave the ranks of Materialism? What would be the look in Charles Bradlaugh's eyes when I told him that I had become a Theosophist? The struggle was sharp and keen but with none of the anguish of old days in it, for the soldier had now fought many fights and was hardened by many wounds. And so it came to pass that I went again to Lansdowne Road to ask about the Theosophical Society. H. P. Blavatsky looked at me piercingly for a momen . 'Have you read the report about me of the Society for Psychical Research?' 'No; I never heard of it, so far as I know.' 'Go and read it, and if, after reading it, you come back—well.' And nothing more would she say on the subject, but branched off to her experiences in many lands.

"I borrowed a copy of the Report, read and re-read it. Quickly I saw how slender was the foundation on which the imposing structure was built. The continual assumptions on which conclusions were based; the incredible character of the allegations; and—most damning fact of all—the foul source from which the evidence was derived. Everything charged against Madame Blavatsky and her colleagues turned on the veracity of the Coulombs, and they were selfstamped as partners in the alleged frauds. Could I put such against the frank, fearless nature that I had caught a glimpse of, against the proud fiery truthfulness that shone at me from the clear, blue eyes, honest and fearless as those of a noble child? Was the writer of *The Secret Doctrine*, this miserable importer, this accomplice

of tricksters, this foul and loathsome deceiver, this conjuror with trap-doors and sliding panels? I laughed aloud at the absurdity and flung the Report aside with the righteous scorn of an honest nature that knew its own kin when it met them and shrank from the foulness and baseness of a lie. The next day saw me at the Theosophical Publishing Company's Office at 7, Duke Street, Adelphi, where Countess Wachtmeister—one of the lealest of H. P. B.'s friends—was at work, and I signed an application to be admitted as Fellow of the Theosophical Society.

"On receiving my diploma I betook myself to Lansdowne Road, where I found H. P. B. alone. I went over to her, bent down and kissed her, but said no word. 'You have joined the Soiety?' 'Yes.' 'You have read the report?' 'Yes.' 'Well?' I knelt down before her and, clasped her hands in mine, looking straight into her eyes. 'My answer is, will you accept me as your pupil, and give me the honour of proclaiming you my teacher in the face of the world? Her stern set face softened, the unwanted kleam of tears sprang to her eyes; then, with a dignity more than regal, she placed her hand upon my head. 'You are a noble woman. May Master bless you'."

"From that day, the 10th of May, 1889, until now—two years three and half months after she left her body, on May 8, 1891—my faith in her has never wavered, my trust in her has never been shaken. I gave her my faith on an imperious intuition, I proved her true day after day in closest intimacy living by her side; and I speak of her with the reverence due from a pupil to a teacher who never failed her, with the passionate gratitude which, in our School, is the natural meed of the one who opens the gateway and points out the path. 'Folly! fanaticism!', scoffs the Englishman of the nineteenth century. Be it so, I have seen, and I can wait."

She thus plunged headlong into Theosophy and, concluding her Autobiography, she avers:

"I know, by personal experiment, that the Soul exists, and

that my Soul, not my body, is myself; that it can leave the body at will; that it can, disembodied reach and learn from living human teachers, and bring back and impress on the physical brain that which it has learned; that this process of transferring consciousness from one range of being, as it were, to another is a very slow process, during which the body and brain are gradually correlated with the subtler form which is essentially that of the Soul; that consciousness, so far from being dependent on the brain, is more active when freed from the gross forms of matter than when encased within them; that the great Sages spoken of by H.P. Blavatsky exist; that they wield powers and possess knowledge before which our control of Nature and knowledge of her ways is but a child's play. All this and much more, have I learned, and I am but a pupil of low grade, as it were, in the infant class of the Occult School; so the first plunge has been successful, and the intuition has been justified. This same path of knowledge that I am treading is open to all others who will pay the toll demanded at the gateway—and that toll is willingness to renounce everything for the sake of spiritual truth, and willingness to give all the truth that is won to the service of man, keeping back no shred for self."

Her review of *The Secret Doctrine* and the public announcement that she had joined the Theosophical Society raised a storm of criticism not only amongst religiously minded Christians but, naturally and most pointedly, in the ranks of those with whom she had worked in defence of free thought and atheism. Charles Bradlaugh wrote as follows about her:

"My regret is greater as I know Mrs Besant's devotion to any course she believes to be true. I know that she will always be earnest in the advocacy of any views she undertakes to defend, and I look to possible developments of her Theosophic views with the very gravest misgiving. The editorial policy of this paper is unchanged, and is directly antagonistic to all forms of Theosophy. I would have preferred on this subject to have held my peace, for the public disagreeing with Mrs Besant on

her adoption of Socialism has caused pain to both; but on reading her article and taking the public announcement made of her having joined the Theosophical organisation, I owe it to those who look to me for guidance to say this with clearness."

Mrs Besant wrote: "It is not possible for me here to state fully my reasons for joining the Theosophical Society, the three objects of which are: to found a Universal Brotherhood without distinction of race or creed; to forward the study of Aryan literature and philosophy; to investigate unexplained laws of nature and the physical powers latent in man. On matters of religious opinion the members are absolutely free. The founders of the Society deny a personal God, and a somewhat subtle form of Pantheism is taught as the Theosophic view of the universe, though even this is not forced on members of the Society. I have no desire to hide the fact that this form of Pantheism appears to me to promise solution of some problems, especially problems in psychology, which Atheism leaves untouched."

Later, Mrs Besant went to Paris for the great Labour Congress and on her return to London, she made a public pronouncement at a lecture entitled "Why I became a Theosophist." The lecture was condensed into a pamphlet which ended with the words: "An imperious necessity forces me to speak the truth, as I see it, whether the speech please or displease, whether it bring praise or blame. That one loyalty to Truth I must keep stainless, whatever friendships fail me or human ties be broken. She may lead me into the wilderness, yet I must follow her; she may strip me of all love, yet I must pursue her; though she slay me, yet will I trust in her! and I ask no other epitaph on my tomb but 'She tried to follow Truth'."

A fierce controversy arose over her conversion to Theosophy. Anonymous friends assisted her at this time with 150 pounds a year. At the same time she went on with her vigorous socialistic work and with the work of the London School Board. She organised the South London fur-workers into a Union. She started a movement for shorten-

ing the hours of tram and bus workers and, all the while, she pursued her studies, reading in railway carriages, tram cars and omnibuses. Notwithstanding differences of opinion, Mr. Charles Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant continued to be intimate friends. Bradlaugh collapsed suddenly in 1889. He sailed to India to attend the National Congress where he was enthusiastically acclaimed as Member for India.

In 1890, Madame Blavatsky who had received a donation of one hundred pounds decided upon the establishment of a Club in East London for working girls. This Club was opened by her and was dedicated by her to the "brightening of the lot of hard-working under-paids". Also in 1890 the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Europe, called the Blavatsky Lodge, was opened, and Bertram Keightley, Countess Wachtmeister, George Mead, Claude Wright, Walter Old, Emily Kislingbury, Isabel Cooper Oakley, Miss Cooper and Herbert Burrows as well as Mrs. Besant became the first participants in its work. Bradlaugh died in 1891; and in Mrs. Besant's Autobiography occurs this passage: "And thus I came through storm to peace, not to the peace of an untroubled sea of outer life, which no strong soul can crave, but to an inner peace that outer troubles may not avail to ruffle—a peace which belongs to the eternal not to the transitory, to the depths not to the shallows of life. It carried me scatheless through the terrible spring of 1891, when death struck down Charles Bradlaugh in the plentitude of his usefulness, and unlocked the gateway into rest for H. P. Blavatsky. Through anxieties and responsibilities heavy and numerous it has borne me; every strain makes it stronger; every trial makes it serener; every assault leaves it more radiant. Quiet confidence has taken the place of doubt; a strong security, the place of anxious dread."

Col. Olcott, the co-founder with H. P. Blavatsky of the Theosophical Society, states in his diary:

"H. P. B. greeted me warmly on my arrival in London on 4th September. I found Mrs. Annie Besant living in the house,

having just come over from the Secularists into our camp, with bag and baggage. This was when her subsequent splendid career as Theosophical lecturer, author, editor, and teacher began; does it not seem strange that she should have ever been anything else than a Theosophist ?.... What I found in her is written in my Diary of 5th September, the evening of our first meeting: 'Mrs. Besant, I find to be a natural Theosophist: her adhesion to us was inevitable, from the attractions of her nature towards the mystical. She is the most important gain to us since Sinnett.'..."

At this stage it may be as well to consider the details of the Theosophical doctrines which Mrs. Besant discussed in her review of Madame Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*—doctrines which won her heart and soul and became a part of her mental and spiritual equipment. The book set out much curious and ancient lore culled from Egyptian, Jewish, Persian, Chinese, Babylonian and Indian sacred literature. It deals with cosmic evolution as well as the evolution of symbolism. The claim is made in the book that it was the heritage and the property of certain Arhats, "wise ones of the East", of whom Madame Blavatsky claimed to be a disciple.

Very briefly and roughly put, the idea is that "Be-ness" or Being (Latin Ens, or Sanskrit *sat*) evolves spirit and matter, spirit descending further and further into matter in search of experiences not otherwise attainable, evolving all forms; it reaches the lowest point, commences its reascent, evolves through mineral, vegetable, animal, until it attains self-consciousness in man; then in man, with his sevenfold nature, it climbs upward spiritualising him as he evolves, until the grosser body and the animal passions are purged away, and his higher principles united to the Atman, the spark of the divine spirit within him, reach their goal, the absolute existence whence they originally came, carrying with them all the gains of their long pilgrimage. This process implies, of course, manifold reincarnations for each human spirit as it climbs the many steps at whose summit alone is Rest. Only when a certain height is touched comes

memory of the past, and then the purified spirit can gaze backwards over the stages of its ascent.

Man as he is now, with his sevenfold nature—physical body, vital principle, 'astral body', animal soul, human or rational soul, human spirit, divine spirit—was not created offhand complete. The First Race was created, breathed out of their own substance, by the beings who built our world, and was spiritual, ethereal, sexless, and of slight intelligence; the Second Race was produced by gemmation from the First, more material than its progenitor and sexual; the Third Race was produced oviparously and among these, separation of the sexes appeared gradually, the earlier being androgynous, the later distinctly male and female. The intellectual development was still very low, for spirit had not yet become sufficiently clothed with matter for selfconscious thought. Of this Race in its later stages were the dwellers in Atlantis and the Lemurians, among whom was the birth of religions, astronomical and sexual; and of these was born the Fourth Race, the giants, the "men of renown" in whom we touch the "purely human period". (A curious excursus on the "third eye" which occurs here, receives remarkable confirmation from some of the latest scientific speculations on the pineal gland.) Now begins civilisation and the building of the great rock cities and the physical and intellectual nature of man develops "at the cost of the psychic and the spiritual", the huge statues and other remains found in Easter Island Bamian, and other spots, bear witness to the size of their makers as do the vast dwellings and the "enormous human bones" of Misorte. With the Fifth Race we pass into the domain of history, and to this the present races of men belong. Far away as, at first sight, all this seems from Occidental science, yet the careful reader will mark the curious analogies between this occult view of human evolution and the scientific view of the evolution of living things on our globe, an evolution still shown in broad outline in the individual development of each human being from ovum to man.

The Arhats are the guardians of the ancient secrets and they are believed to be residents in certain monasteries in Tibet; and Mrs. Besant herself claimed to have visited Tibet and got into personal contacts with some of the Mahatmas like Koot Hoomi, Maurya and others.

In the Theosophical Society, there were men like W. Q. Judge, A. P. Sinnett, as well as, of course, Col. Olcott, who claimed to be in constant contact with these Himalayan adepts. And C. W. Leadbeater was one of the persons who asserted that in dream and in waking vision and in many other occult ways, he had contacts with the adepts and their teachings. Many of these colleagues of Mrs. Besant, after she became a theosophist, and Madame Blavatsky herself engaged themselves in examining and developing phenomena like clairvoyance, telepathy and other spiritual manifestations, either by themselves or through mediums like Madame Coulomb, which subsequently became matters of great controversy and bitter dispute. It would be profitless to enter into the details of these controversies which, inaugurated by a large number of Christian missionaries, found expression in the pages of the Christian College Magazine of Madras and various periodicals, American and English. It was asserted that Madame Coulomb and her associates were parties, along with some members of the Theosophical Society, to sheer trickery in the production of certain phenomena reported to have taken place in Simla, Madras and other places. This suggestion was repudiated by theosophists and the dispute raged over many years. Suffice it to say, at this stage, that Mrs. Besant, although she collaborated with Leadbeater in books like *Alcyon* and *Man, Whence and Whither*, which purported to be the transcripts of certain occult glimpses of the past history of mankind and the previous incarnation of various individuals, never claimed to be an adept herself; nor did she make herself responsible for any overt phenomena of a supernatural character.

In 1889 Mrs. Besant first transferred her allegiance to theosophy. It was in 1890 that she met C. W. Leadbeater at

A. P. Sinnett's house in London. In 1891 she had already become the President of the Blavatsky Lodge. Welcoming Col. Olcott, she used the following words: "Chosen by the Masters as President for life of the Theosophical Society, associated with their messenger H. P. B., bound together by every tie that binds, no words we can utter, no thought we can think, can add anything to the loyalty which every member must feel to our President." Madame Blavatsky who, from 1873, associated herself in spiritual research in America with Col. Olcott and W. Q. Judge, had transferred her activities to India and in 1879 organised the Theosophical Society. The Society's objects were: (1) to found a nucleus of a universal brotherhood, (2) to promote the study of Aryan and other Eastern literature, religions and sciences, and (3) to investigate the unfamiliar laws of nature and the latent faculties of man. Madame Blavatsky died in 1891: and Mrs. Besant in 1892 made her first promise to the Indian theosophists to visit India. At that time, there were living in India not only Col. Olcott, the President-Founder of the Society, but also the General Secretary, Bertram Keightley, and Mr. Edge. In 1893 Mrs. Besant was deputed, along with the Vice-President of the Society, Mr. W. Q. Judge, to represent the Society at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. In that Parliament both Mrs. Besant and Professor Gyanendranath Chakravarthy spoke; and it is reported that Mrs. Besant rose to unusual heights of eloquence.

IV

Arrival in India

On the 16th of November 1893, as auspicious occasion as testified to by Mr. Alan Leo (Col. Olcott's friend and a great astrologer), Mrs. Besant inaugurated her Indian tour with two lectures in Kandy. Subsequently she spoke at Tuticorin, Bangalore, Bezwada and other places; and there was the great Convention held at Adyar, later the chief headquarters of the Society, at which she spoke on "The Building of the Cosmos". During 1894, Mrs. Besant lectured successively at Benares, Agra, Lahore and Bombay. While she was at Adyar, she threw herself into the work of founding a school for backward communities called the "Olcott Panchama School" and she began her campaign of national education. At a great meeting in the Pachaiappa's College, Madras, she pleaded for the reformation of the Indian educational system. Very soon after she became a theosophist and arrived in India, she came into contact with the leaders of Indian life. Mahatma Gandhi writes of her:

"When I was studying in London in 1888 and after, I had become, like many like me, an admirer of Bradlaugh and Besant. Imagine my excitement when one fine morning I read in the London Press that Annie Besant had become a Theosophist under Blavatsky's inspiration. I was a mere boy practicallv unknown to anybody. I would have been more than satisfied if I could have touched the hem of the garments of Madame Blavatsky and her distinguished disciple. But I could not, though some friends had kindly taken me to Blavatsky Lodge. When Dr. Besant came to India and captivated the country, I

came in close touch with her and though we had political differences, my veneration for her did not suffer abatement."

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who met Mrs. Besant for the first time in 1901, says this of her: "One of the outstanding events in my life is the day when I first met Annie Besant. I was twelve then and both her personality, the legends that already surrounded her heroic career and her oratory overwhelmed me. With a young boy's admiration and devotion I gazed at her and followed her about. Then came a gap of many years during which period I hardly saw her; but that admiration continued for a great and unique personality. Long years afterwards I again came into intimate contact with her in the political field and again I became a devoted admirer.

"It has been a very great privilege for me to have known her and to have worked with her to some extent, for undoubtedly she was a dominating figure of the age. India especially owes a very deep debt of gratitude for all she did to enable her to find her own soul."

The great Sanskritist and scholar, Dr. Bhagavan Das, like Prof. Chakravarthy, became one of her close associates and colleagues and she came into intimate contact with him. This is what he says: "In 1901, after her Benares home, Santi Kunja, had been built, she desired to renovate an old temple standing on its grounds which had gone out of repair. Though her religion was Theosophy, which embraces all creeds alike, she desired to Indianise herself in ways of living and appearance as much as possible, so as to get into touch with the heart of the Indian people. Hence her desire to renovate the temple. In connection with this, a small gathering of the foremost Pandits of Benares, therefore of the whole of India, was invited. When the renowned Pandit Gangadhara Shastri entered and saw her welcoming the guests, he exclaimed (in Sanskrit). 'The allwhite Saraswathi', which is one of the designations of the culture Goddess." Dr. Bhagavan Das acted as her Personal Assistant in Benares and on some of the long tours she made in India,

year after year, in connection with her work, for some ten years before she made Adyar her principal residence. From 1893 she spent more and more of her time in India and the influence that she exercised on Indians was unique and epoch-making. One of her great devotees and admirers, Fritz Kunz, speaks of his impressions in 1905 as follows: "Her lectures on the *Bhagavad Gita* commenced today. An Indian audience then was overwhelmingly masculine, even in the purdah-free South. The hall was charged with people and with expectation. Young and old came miles to hear Mrs. Besant's eloquence released in their own defence. The speaker was then not far, I suppose, from the peak of her powers, and the experience was new to me; that effortless and deceptive speed, the rounded and open-throat quality of voice, a cadence and a rush, a fractional rest, and then a little spate of words culminating in a memorable phrase. The printed verbatim reports of such an art convey very little of the pent power communicated to the audience by the vocal resources. They show, however, that the literary style was not florid. On the contrary, it was in impeccable taste. A few simple thoughts were brought home with emotional power derived from the audience; no mawkishness from the speaker. She was audible to thousands. Yet in private conversation her voice was sometimes almost inaudibly low. Usually she begins a public address at a pitch just on the verge of audibility, and this quieted the hearers and brought them towards her, so to speak. But in full flight every word and even the breathings of the final consonants, showered to the farthest reaches of the rapt audience."

What Mr. Kunz has stated in the above paragraph can be corroborated by the experience of many others. A great scholar and skilful parliamentarian, C. Ramalinga Reddy, describes Mrs. Besant as follows: "Mrs. Besant continued to be a world leader, while those who were born long after she reached her middle age, not merely grew old, but fell into decay. Her entire life is a model of whole-hearted

devotion to truth as she found it, of resolute sincerity and courage. She implanted the seeds of self-respect in this land of slaves of government and tradition. Some accused her of rationalising our superstitions, but is not that itself a tribute to her rationalism? She started life as a doubter and revolutionary. In a moving passage she has told us how she visited one of the leaders of the Oxford movement and found him cold and irresponsive. She was never cold, not even to strayed revellers like myself, nor unresponsive. Theosophy was her religion but humanity her surging passion. If at a later time in her life she found the peace of heart she was after and that reconciliation between this world and the one beyond, which made a harmonious existence possible for her, in tenets and mysteries of Theosophy, it was not by turning false to her nature but by being more fully true and consistent, and fulfilling it to its sublime logical climax.

"In what direction was not Mrs Besant great, in what field not the pioneer tiller and sower? She poured new life into every department of life and culture and into all the races and countries of the world. Education, social reform, aye even forbidden sex, labour and radical movements, political evolution of dependent peoples into Statehood and nationhood and self-respect, a closer organisation of warring nations into mutual understanding and sympathy and a co-operative global order—in the encylopaedia of human endeavour has anyone shown greater dynamic drive and foresight than Mrs. Besant? She grew with the years and grew beyond them and kept on growing. Old age forsooth! Every year was a new age with her and no nonage. Humanity, drenched in wars, lies and bloodshed—you did not deserve such a Mother. That is why she left us, the immortal, the immaculate."

The remarks of Mr. C. R. Reddy are especially valuable because he was not able to see eye to eye with Mrs. Besant in her religious outlook. Similarly, Mr. C. Rajagopalachariar who observes that as a young man he kept somewhat away from

Mrs. Besant, makes the following statement concerning her work in India at this period: "Among those who have materially contributed to the shaping of India, Mrs. Besant is one of the biggest personalities. She helped young India to feel sure of the greatness of Indian culture and religion. Christianity as well as Science has made a great and successful attack on Hindu religion. Mrs. Besant's service in repelling these attacks and in conserving the self-confidence of India in these matters deserves most grateful appreciation. Mrs. Besant was one of those who, like Gandhiji, could not be put in a compartment. All things are interrelated and religion, politics, art, industry, education, all are interrelated branches of the same Truth. Mrs. Besant therefore took as much part in politics as in the revival movement of Hinduism. Her contribution to the cause of Indian freedom is great. Lokamanya Tilak, Gandhiji and other Indian leaders were her contemporaries."

It was significant that long before Mrs. Besant became a theosophist, she was fascinated by India. As early as 1885, she wrote some tales for children in the "Young Folks Library" and in the first story, "Ganga and the River Maid", she gave a description of India. At the time that Mrs. Besant came into the theosophical world, there were only a few books of theosophical literature such as *Isis Unveiled, The Secret Doctrine* and *Esoteric Buddhism*. But as Jinarajadasa says: "When Dr. Besant became a theosophist, she did something which nobody else could have done. She took the Truths of Theosophy from these books and presented them in public addresses, full of idealism and beauty. That is the remarkable gift which she had; she gave beautiful settings for all these wonderful Truths. We find her always giving to Theosophical work an aspect which never existed before. I think particularly of one lecture of hers, which I did not hear because I was in America at that time. It was a lecture called 'The Spiritual Life for the Man of the World', given at City Temple; it is exquisite in form, and there could not be a more artistic presentation of a great topic.

One can take the lecture, analyse it section by section, and see how the whole subject is presented with a perfect symmetry. She had also given a set of lectures entitled 'The Outer Court' and then later 'The Changing World'. All these have an artistic structure, and the second work plans for an ideal united world.

"I think Dr. Besant can be described more as an artist than as a lecturer of the professional type, because she does not survey any subject in its entirety, but gives a definite presentation of it from some one angle which she selects, as a painter does when painting a landscape. While she gives Wisdom, she gives it in an exquisite setting. Of her many works, perhaps the one that will last longest is that most fascinating book, **A** *Study in Consciousness,* for, in it there is a depth of philosophical presentation that will fascinate many a generation to come."

Bishop Leadbeater, according to C. Jinarajadasa (who succeeded Mrs. Besant as President of the Theosophical Society) developed the power of clairvoyance slowly; but according to him, Mrs. Besant developed it almost overnight in 1896.

From the moment that Mrs. Besant landed in India, she began strenuously to work for the all-round regeneration of the country. To quote C. Jinarajadasa again, "Now we come to another facet, the Regeneration of India. The moment Mrs. Besant landed in India in 1893, she set that work before herself. She lectured on the best that is in Hinduism, she preached a new type of education, and she urged Theosophical Lodges to start new schools, and to keep the keynote of Indian ideals when teaching Hindu boys and girls. Before she landed in 1893, she already spoke of India as her Motherland. That phrase is in a letter she wrote in 1892."

She was one of the chief inspirers of the Women's Indian Association and its first President. This association through the influence of Mrs. Besant and her colleagues spread out all over India from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas, from Peshawar to Sylhet in Assam. The whole country was covered with a network of this women's organisation which worked for furthering

the progress of women in education, industry, politics, as well as other aspects of women's uplift. Thus the women were banded together for the service of their country, so much so that when the Southborough Commission visited India, Mrs. Besant and Mrs. Naidu and the members of the Women's Indian Association waited on Mr. Montagu, the then Secretary of State for India, and presented a memorandum which stated that Indian women also should be made eligible for the franchise on the same terms as men. Mrs. Cousins took a leading part in this movement as also Mrs. C. Jinarajadasa, the then Secretary of the W.I.A. Both these ladies were theosophists and accompanied Annie Besant from their native country to India. Mrs. Cousins and her husband, Dr. Cousins, had adopted this land as their own and had been rendering yeoman service to the Indian people in all walks of life.

It must not be forgotton that Annie Besant was the prime factor in influencing men and women of other lands in favour of Hindu thought and culture at a time when India's own sons and daughters were becoming strangers to their own religion and culture and were beginning to think that their ancestors had been barbarians and forgetting to learn even their own mother-tongue, much less the language of the Vedas and the Upanishads. It was Annie Besant who not only translated the Gita into simple and pure English, but also compiled small booklets containing tales of Aryan greatness for the use of little boys and girls. She also produced a universal Textbook of Religion and Morals which is a compendium of the basic truths of all great religions. Through her efforts, mainly, as well as those of Swami Vivekananda, the Western world came to know something of India's spiritual treasures which were engulfed in centuries of darkness and oblivion. She was the one who brought the light and illumined the hidden treasures of Indian thought.

One of the first tasks to which Mrs. Besant committed herself in India was the founding of the Central Hindu College at Benares in 1898 with the co-operation and support of many

Indian colleagues, only some of whom were theosophists. She was convinced that the direction of education in India must be in the hands of Indians and that they should shoulder the monetary and administrative responsibilities of evolving educational institutions. She insisted that the guiding spirit of Indian education should be patriotic in outlook, that it should not be divorced from the essence of religion and that it should take the utmost possible advantage of Western science and technology. She had evolved certain basic psychological and scientific ideas on the subject and she insisted on catering to the largest number of pupils by charging the minimum possible fee. She also insisted that Brahmacharya or celibacy was necessary for young people for their intellectual, physical and emotional growth. The Central Hindu College High School was not open to married pupils. Religion was made an important plank of education and, in addition, the youths of the institution were trained for social work. Organisations like the "Sons and Daughters of India", "Scouts and Guards of Honour" were inaugurated. Men gathered around her not only from India but from the West, who worked for the love of the teaching profession and of her ideals, for a small pittance or for no salary at all. From time to time, the deficit in the working of the institution was defrayed by Mrs. Besant herself. Persons like G. S. Arundale, C. S. Trilokekar, Bhagavan Das and others who were great educationists cooperated with her; and very soon she launched a plan for a Central University. The scheme was launched in 1910, aided by a most influential Board of Trustees including Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya a great patriot and orator, S. Subramania Iyer, Madras, Narayana Chandavarkar, Bombay, Ashutosh Mukherji, Calcutta, P. C. Chatterji, Lahore, S. Sinha, Bankipur, A. Hydari, Hyderabad (Deccan), Govinda Das, Benares City, B. Cowasjee, Rangoon (Burma), N. D. Khandalawala, Poona, Pratap Singh, Kapurthala, Hirendranath Datta, Calcutta, D. B. Jayatilaka, Ceylon, Syed Hassan Imam, Bankipur, Mazharul Haq, Bankipur, Lala Sultan Singh, Delhi, Ganga Prasad Verma,

Lucknow, and Shyam Sunder Lal, Gwalior. A petition, supported by the Viceroy, was submitted to His Majesty the King of England for founding a new type of university. It is so important as indicating the outlook and the aims of Mrs. Besant that its preamble may be quoted in full:

"1. For some time past your petitioners have felt the need for and are desirous of establishing a new University in India, having a field of activity of a distinctive character from the existing Universities, and possessing special features of its own; moreover your petitioners believe in accordance with the declarations of the Imperial Government on many occasions that higher education should more and more devolve on private and voluntary endeavours, thus lessening the burden on the State, and that the establishment of a University resting on such endeavours is absolutely necessary for unifying and rendering effective Indian initiative in educational matters.

"2. The most marked speciality of the proposed University will lie in the fact that it will affiliate no college in which religion and morality do not form an integral part of the education given. It will make no distinctions between religions, accepting equally Hindu, Buddhist, Parsi, Christian and Muhammadan, but it will not affiliate any purely secular institution. It will thus supply a gap in the educational system of India, and will draw together all the elements which regard the training of youth in honour and virtue as the most essential part of education. It will be a nursery of good citizens instead of only a mint for hall-marking a certain standard of knowledge.

"3. The second important speciality will be the placing in the first rank of Indian philosophy, history and literature and seeking in these, and in the classical languages of India, the chief means of culture. While Western thought will be amply studied, Eastern thought will take the lead, and Western knowledge will be used to enrich but not to distort or to cripple, the expanding national life.

"4. The third important speciality will be the paying of

special attention to manual and technical training, to science applied to agriculture and manufactures, and to Indian arts and crafts, so as to revive these now decaying industries while bringing from the West all that can usefully be assimilated for the increasing of national prosperity.

"5. Your petitioners desire that, in the beginning, the University of India shall be only an examining body like the Government Universities in India and the well established Central Hindu College, Benares, has given permission to the proposed University to use its building for examination and office purposes; they trust however that the University will later become a teaching body and fulfil the true ideal of university life, unknown at present in India; and for this they have made preparation in the powers asked for.

"6. Your petitioners believe that the interests of education in India will be greatly advanced by the proposed undertaking, and that the success of the said undertaking will be greatly promoted if it should seem fit to Your Majesty by your Royal Charter to incorporate and establish a University in India under the name of the University of India with such powers as to Your Majesty may seem proper for the purpose of carrying out the objects aforesaid.

"7. Your petitioners therefore most humbly pray that Your Majesty may be graciously pleased, in the exercise of your Royal Prerogative, to grant a Charter of Incorporation creating the University of India, and extending to it all the powers, privileges and provisions, fully set forth in the accompanying draft charter, or such of them as to Your Majesty may seem meet."

Side by side with these educational efforts, Mrs. Besant began to contemplate the political scene around her. Before the Indian National Congress was founded, there were several movements indicating the surge of a new life, but they had lost some part of their original dynamism. Among such movements were the Brahmo Samaj and the British Indian Association of Calcutta.

In the journalistic field, Surendranath Banerji in the *Bengalee* and Narendranath Sen in his *Indian Mirror* voiced Indian aspirations. In the Punjab, Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj. In Bombay *Indu Prakash* was doing the same work as the *Indian Mirror* of Calcutta. Bombay produced great leaders such as Dadabhai Naoroji, Pheroze Shah Mehta, Justice Ranade (who by his historical labours gave a new impetus to Indian patriotism), Gokhale, D. E. Wacha, and others. In Poona, the Ferguson College was started as an effort of patriotic self-sacrifice for promoting national education. The Sarvajanik Sabha in Poona and the Mahajana Sabha in Madras were centres of political activity. The *Hindu* newspaper, amongst whose early contributors were K. Sundararama Aiyar, Raghunatha Rao and T. Madhava Rao, was expressing the new patriotic ideas.

The Theosophical Society shifted its headquarters from England to India in 1879. The leaders of this Society who gathered in its annual Conventions were also instrumental in rousing the patriotic feelings in the country. A. O. Hume, a noteworthy member of the I.C.S., retired from his position as Secretary to Government and joined the Theosophical Society; and later on, he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the cause of Indian political emancipation. In England, men like Henry Fawcett, John Bright and Charles Bradlaugh (who won the name of Member of Parliament for India) were upholding the cause of India. Mrs. Besant encouraged the starting of a newspaper in Bengal called the *Phoenix*. Its first editor was A. P. Sinnett who retired from the editorship of the *Pioneer* to take up this work, but the paper failed for want of financial encouragement. About the same period, just after the Convention at Adyar in December 1884, a number of people gathered together in Madras and started the idea of a national movement. The first session of the Indian National Congress was held in Bombay in 1885 with W. C. Bonnerjee, the noted Bengal lawyer as the President. It demanded the expansion of Legislative Councils and the in-

clusion of elected members. At this time, A. O. Hume, welcoming this movement, produced a number of political pamphlets. Deputations of indian politicians went to England and a Committee was appointed to carrying on the work in England, amongst whom were A.O. Hume, Sir William Wedderburn and Sir Henry Cotton. A newspaper called *India* was started in England. Its first Editor was Gordon Hewart who afterwards became the Lord Chief Justice of England. In the British House of Commons, India gained support from Members of Parliament like W. S. Caine, Samuel Smith, Charles Bradlaugh, Herbert Roberts, and others. Bradlaugh, as already stated, attended the Bombay Congress in 1889 and Sir William Wedderburn read the welcome speech. He was a retired I.C.S. officer from Bombay. The Government woke up and tried both the methods of conciliation and punishment. A number of Indians were made High Court Judges and Members of Council and others were prosecuted for sedition or externed. Successive sessions of the Congress were however successfully conducted. In 1906, Dadabhai Naoroji presided over the Calcutta Congress just after the partition of Bengal and the Congress adopted the fourfold programme of Swaraj, Swadeshi, Boycott of British Goods and National Education. The Congress then split into two groups, styled Moderates and Extremists. The Surat Congress of 1907 was presided over by Rash Behari Ghosh. Disturbances took place in the Congress pandal and the left wing seceded; it was composed of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghose, S. Duraiswami, and several others. In April 1908 the Allahabad Congress was held and the Extremists were excluded. In 1909 the Minto-Morley Reforms were introduced which gave separate representation for Muslims and stirred up new conflicts between the two communities. The Congress then came under the control of the Extremists and the Moderates held separate Conferences apart from the Congress. It was in 1912 that an attempt was made to assassinate the Viceroy. A conspiracy arose in the Punjab to win independence by force;

and Bhai Paramanand of the Punjab and Aurobindo Ghose were prosecuted. The latter who was a fiery patriot and a great writer and savant was indicted on tainted evidence. After the trial, he left British India and settled in Pondicherry where his great gifts of literary exposition and religious leadership found full expression.

Helped by Dr. Bhagavan Das, Mrs. Besant published text-books on Hinduism entitled the Sanatana Dharma Series. She took pledges from boys and girls in favour of abstaining from early marriages and she condemned virgin widowhood and the ban on foreign voyages. Helped by self-sacrificing educationists like Arundale and Iqbal Narayan Gurtu she made a conspicuous success of the Central Hindu College; and it became a nucleus radiating the Hindu culture and ideals. In September 1913 she organised "The Brothers of Service". They pledged themselves to promote national unity and the country's all-round progress. Her lectures in 1913 related to educational, social and political reform. They included talks on self-government, mass education of boys and girls, the colour bar, the colonial system and the caste system. These were published in a book called *Wake Up, India*. She also spoke of certain personal beliefs which included the idea of a higher and inner spiritual government of the world. Isvara or the Supreme Ruler was, according to the Theosophical belief, assisted by the great hierarchies. Sanath Kumara, according to her belief, was the representative of Isvara, residing along with his disciples in a place called Shamballa in the Gobi desert. She also believed that Vyvasvata Manu was still in his astral form guiding the Government of the world, with the help of Rishis and Adepts like Agastya, Maurya and Koot Hoomi. She specially believed that the last two were residing in the Himalayan region and were inspirers of the Theosophical Society, guiding human evolution. She further believed that these great ones would help India to achieve all-round progress and evolve into a self-governing unit working for universal peace and welfare.

Inspired by these beliefs and openly stating that she was so inspired and guided, in October 1913 she spoke at a great public meeting in Madras pleading for a Standing Committee of the House of Commons for considering Indian affairs so that India might attain Swaraj or self-rule. She demanded that there should be an organised agitation in the country throughout the year and not merely during the annual conferences. She founded the weekly newspaper *Commonweal* in January 1914 to assist her in her political work and agitation for Swaraj. In June 1914, she purchased the *Madras Standard* and re-named it *New India.* She wrote continuously in its pages and commenced an intensive campaign claiming Home Rule for India. She became a delegate to the Indian National Congress in December 1914. She believed that in 1915 she contacted her Guru in the astral body and, over and over again, she referred to what she called "marching orders" from her Guru. They were reiterated by her in the following words attributed to the Guru: "You will have your time of trouble and danger. Don't let your opposition degenerate into anger. Be firm but not provocative. Press steadily for the coming changes and claim India's equal place in the Empire."

In pursuance of this message which she claimed to have received, her programme was steady and unflinching. The main planks of the programme were: India should be in the Commonwealth but equal to the other Dominions; Indian freedom should be attained by peaceful methods and all violence should be eschewed. She attended the Bombay Congress of December 1915 over which Lord Sinha presided. He was a pronounced Moderate and called those who wanted full freedom for India "impatient idealists". In reaction against his statement, Mrs. Besant called a private meeting in 1915 in Bombay at Chinabaugh and submitted her plan for the starting of a Home Rule League with the object of attaining complete Home Rule for India. She was not afraid to use the phrase Home Rule although many people were startled by it as it recalled the violent

Home Rule Movement of Ireland under Parnell. The people who attended the meeting were divided into two groups (1) her followers and friends, and (2) others, afraid of the formation of the new movement, who insisted that the Congress alone should take up the work. She agreed to wait.

V

Campaign For Home Rule

It was in 1916 that Mrs. Besant's active political work was renewed soon after the termination of a case (in which she was the defendant) initiated by G. Narayaniah, the father of the present world celebrity J. Krishnamurthi. This case terminated in 1915. Thereafter, the lawyer for the plaintiff joined her in her political work. It was characteristic of Mrs. Besant's generosity and fairness that the frank criticism of certain Theosophical tenets and personages indulged in by the advocate aforesaid during the progress of the case did not prevent her from collaborating with him in her political work.

Annie Besant's characteristics may perhaps be best illustrated by a reference to her relations with J. Krishnamurthi. As is well known, Krishnamurthi's father had entrusted the education and upbringing of his two sons, Krishnamurthi and Nityananda, to Mrs. Bensant. Later on prompted and financed by some who were personally opposed to Mrs. Besant and regarded her as a foreigner who tried to overturn Hindu society, the father instituted proceedings for recovering the custody of the children from Mrs. Besant who had not only spent large sums of money on the education of the boys but had arranged for their being entered in an English university. The author of this book is fully acquainted with the details of the action as he appeared for the plaintiff, Mr. Narayaniah. Mrs. Besant defended the action herself; and her demeanour and advocacy in the Madras High Court were on a par with her historic performances as her own lawyer in the English courts. She was firm but always

courteous to the Judge, notwithstanding that the Judge was an Englishman and was deeply prejudiced against her from every point of view—as one who had broken away from Christianity and adopted Hindu modes of life and thought and as one ranged against the British Government in political matters. The Judges who heard her case could not but admire the legal erudition that she displayed, the eloquence of her pleading and the logical common sense underlying every word that she spoke.

In the course of the case, she declined to disclose or to produce in court certain documents relating to Mr. Leadbeater whom she had constituted the preceptor of the boys under her guardianship and against whom certain grave allegations were made. Such documents included the proceedings of a body of Theosophists in Australia. When ordered to produce those documents and papers, Mrs. Besant claimed privilege but her contention was not upheld. The plaintiff then suggested to his lawyer that she should be proceeded against for contempt of court. The lawyer declined to do so, stating that whilst he was willing to conduct the case in respect of guardianship, he would not be vindictive. Nothing could illustrate Mrs. Besant's essential character more than her reaction to this attitude on the part of the opposing lawyer. She wrote to him to the effect that while she appreciated his chivalrous courtesy, she yet took exception to his disregarding his client's instructions and added that it was his duty to proceed against her for contempt. She concluded by saying, "I am so touched by your generous outlook and by your attitude that I would request you as a favour, after this case is over, to co-operate with me in the educational and political work in which I am now engaged." The lawyer did not reply to this letter till after the case was over; but thereafter, he not only accepted her offer but became one of her staunchest lieutenants and supporters in the Home Rule League, in her work in connection with the National University and in the Scout Movement which she inaugurated.

To continue the narrative regarding the case, Mrs. Besant

lost in the Indian courts but gained, on a technical point, in her Appeal to the Privy Council. She helped to complete the education of Krishnamurthi and his brother; and thereafter Krishnamurthi became one of the leading figures in the Theosophical Movement and was regarded by some, including Mrs. Besant, as likely to be the coming Messiah. It happened, however, that Krishnamurthi violently reacted against the working of the esoteric section of the Society and broke away from it declaring that his mission was to force people to give up conventional religious beliefs and the apparatus of man-made refuges from reality, and to promote self-reliance. Not only did he break away from the Theosophical Society but a large number of members from the Society followed him and today he ranks as one of the great leaders of a variety of new thought having a numerous following in India, in America and many other parts of the world.

In the course of his early statements, Krishnamurthi severely criticised many persons and many beliefs, the targets of such criticism including Mrs. Besant herself, his teacher George Arundale, and his immediate preceptor C. W. Leadbeater. Mrs. Besant, however, never wavered in her love and affection for him and she did not regret the benefactions that she had Showered upon Krishnamurthi.

Under the inspiration of Ranade, Gokhale and others the Servants of India Society was founded which pledged to work for public good in different directions. It represented the moderate group in politics. But the partition of Bengal and the repressive policy pursued in Punjab, Bombay and Bengal and the prosecution of leaders like Tilak, Lajpat Rai and others produced great bitterness in men's minds. Savarkar was indicted for being implicated in the assassination of Wylie. He escaped when he was being brought to India for trial, but was captured. He was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment. After his release, he became the President of the Hindu Maha Sabha. The leaders of the Revolutionary Movement in Bengal edited succes-

sively the *Bande Mataram, Nava Sakti, Karma Yogi* and *Dharma;* and Bepin Chandra Pal helped in this work. The Terrorist Movement arose and spread in Bengal. Many young men who joined the Movement were prosecuted and sentenced to death. Some Sikhs who had settled in Canada and the U.S. and then returned, started the Ghadar Movement.

It was in this posture of affairs that Mrs. Besant, who had already founded the Central Hindu College, planned her comprehensive work for India. Her first idea was, as already outlined, to start a great National University aimed at promoting Indian nationalism. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, who was then a prominent political leader in the United Provinces, wanted a Hindu University side by side with the Aligarh Muslim University which was being advocated by the great Sir Syed Ahmed. Mrs. Besant, as we have seen, tried to get a Charter for the National University; but confronted with several difficulties and much opposition, she agreed, with great self-sacrifice, to hand over the Central Hindu College to serve as a nucleus for the Hindu University aimed at by Pandit Malaviya. In 1921 the University honoured itself by conferring a doctorate on Mrs. Besant.

In Madras, she started the Y.M.I.A. and her attempt was to restrain the students in Benares and Madras and make them refrain from the Terrorist Movement which was very prominent in Poona and in Bengal. In Poona, two British military officers were assassinated in connection with the severe measures taken to control the plague outbreak. In Bengal attempts were made to assassinate British Officers and Khudiram Bose was prosecuted and sentenced to death for throwing bomb at Kingsford's carriage which happened to carry a European lady, Mrs. Kennedy and her daughter. Both of them were killed by mistake. At this time Mrs. Besant, in pursuance of her uniform policy, spoke against political crime although it might be inspired by patriotism.

It was about 1885 that the first Indian deputation went to

England to plead the cause of India. It consisted of Surendranath Banerji, Chandavarkar and Salem Ramaswami Mudaliar. Other deputations went to England thereafter; and in 1913 Bupendranath Basu, Jinnah, Samarth, Lajpat Rai and others went there. Very few tangible results were achieved by these efforts and public disappointment and frustration became widespread. At this juncture, the Home Rule League was started on the 3rd of September 1916 by Mrs. Besant who initiated the first attempt at mass appeal. She also organised "The Order of the Sons and Daughters of India". She was definitely of the opinion that the Moderates and the Extremists should unite together and work for Hindu-Muslim unity so that a united national demand might be made. In 1916 she went to Poona with the author to plead with Tilak for the union of her Home Rule League with the one already founded by him under the same name. She was repulsed by Tilak and she did not succeed in her object. In her efforts to bring the Hindus and Muslims together, she persuaded Mohammad Ali Jinnah to become one of the office-bearers of the Home Rule League. She was helped by a number of able and enthusiastic supporters including Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Kanji Dwarkadas, Umar Sobani and Shankerlal Banker as well as by influential and farsighted businessmen like Lala Sultan Singh of Delhi and Narottom of Bombay. In the weekly *Commonweal* and the daily *New India* Arundale and B. P. Wadia assisted her with zeal and great competence. Day after day in the columns of *New India* she wrote upholding the claims of India to Swaraj. The *New India* Press was repeatedly called upon to furnish security under the newly enacted laws and such securities were repeatedly forfeited. She pleaded in the High Court both personally and through her Advocate (the author); and the trial gave the Home Rule Movement great publicity; and various branches of the League were formed in all parts of the country.

The Lucknow Congress saw a temporary rapprochment between the Moderates and the Extremists and the Congress-

League Reforms Scheme was formulated. There was a strong statement for Indian Home Rule by Mrs. Besant in 1916 at the Cuddalore Political Conference. Lord Pentland who was then Governor of Madras sent for her and asked her to leave India. She declined. Thereupon in June 1917, Mrs. Besant as well as G. S. Arundale and B. P. Wadia, her colleagues in political and journalistic work, were interned under the orders of the Madras Government. Prior to her going into internment in Ootacamund she published an open letter in which she expressed her hope and firm belief that India would soon win Home Rule. A large number of protest meetings were held in Madras and all over India, and each succeeding month processions and meetings were organised. The internment was instrumental in strengthening the freedom movement not only in India but abroad. President Wilson of America, to whom a stirring letter was addressed by Sir Subramania Iyer, a retired Hight Court Judge and follower of Mrs. Besant, indicated to the British Government his sympathy with the Indian movement. A Proclamation was issued by the Secretary of State and the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, in 1917, which asserted the intention to grant self-government by the gradual development of self-governing institutions. In pursuance of this policy Mr. Montagu and the Viceroy toured the country to formulate a scheme after gathering public opinion. By then, Mrs. Besant was released as the result of continuous agitation and of growing public indignation, and in August 1917 she was made the President of the National Congress in Calcutta.

The opening words of her Presidential Address at Calcutta (excerpts from which are given in the Appendix) were these:

"While I was humiliated, you crowned me with honour; while I was slandered, you believed in my integrity and good faith; while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power, you acclaimed me as your leader; while I was silenced and unable to defend myself, you defended me and won for me release. It was proud to serve in lowest fashion, but you lifted me up

and placed me before the world as your chosen representative. I have no words with which to thank you, no eloquence with which to repay my debt. My deeds must speak for me, for words are too poor. I turn your gift into service to the Motherland; I consecrate my life anew to her in worship by action. All that I have and am, I lay on the Altar of the Mother, and together we shall cry, more by service than by words, Vande Mataram !"

Mrs. Besant went round the country pleading for Home Rule. The Montagu-Chelmsford proposals had instituted diarchy in the Provinces and left the Central Government untouched. One section of the Congress welcomed the reforms, whereas others denounced them. In August 1918 a special Congress was held at which Hassan Imam presided and the author was one of the Secretaries. At that time, the Moderates and the Extremists came to a kind of compromise and pleaded for full Responsible Government in the Provinces. In the Congress of December 1918, Mrs. Besant, agreeing that the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were disappointing, proposed that they should be worked for what they were worth. In pursuance of this idea, she advised some of her friends to work from within the Government. It was then that some persons who had worked in the Congress and the Home Rule League accepted office under the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme; among them were Tej Bahadur Sapru, Surendranath Banerji, Chimanlal Setalvad, C. Y. Chintamani and the author.

By 1918 Gandhiji had returned from South Africa having organised passive resistance for redressing the grievances of British Indians. He laboured hard on behalf of the Indigo estate workers in Bihar and pleaded for his specific doctrines of Ahimsa or non-violence and Satyagraha or passive resistance. He developed doctrines which aimed at paralysing the Government by non-co-operating with the functions of the Government, boycotting Legislative Councils and local bodies, calling upon lawyers to give up practice and exhorting people to court prose-

cution and disobey selected laws, suffering imprisonment and sale of their properties, and by conducting a campaign of non-payment of taxes—all these methods being resorted to for compelling the Government to agree to Swaraj. Mrs. Besant objected on principle to Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience Movement though she carried on at the same time her intensive agitation for Home Rule. She, who had co-operated with Bradlaugh in his movement of resistance to unjust laws but at the same time protested against violence, felt that she could not but take the attitude that she adopted with regard to Gandhiji's Civil Disobedience Movement. She at the same time expressed great admiration for Gandhiji's lofty ideals and personal self-abnegation and love of truth. Gandhiji's movement gained great popularity amongst the frustrated masses of the country. Mrs. Besant lost her popularity and, between the years 1920 and 1930, the Civil Disobedience Movement on the one hand and the Swaraj Movement on the other were both working in full force. In the course of the Civil Disobedience Movement many excesses were committed by the people; and, at one time, Gandhiji styled his own advice a "Himalayan blunder".

In 1919 there was a Committee of Enquiry appointed by Parliament and presided over by Lord Selborne. Mrs. Besant appeared as a representative of the National Home Rule League, and various other representatives pleaded the cause of India before the Committee. Before this date Mrs. Besant had founded the Madras Parliament in order to accustom political workers to parliamentary work and procedure. It met periodically in the Gokhale Hall in Madras which was erected at her own cost. The debates were published as memoranda, one of which was the Panchayat Act, and the other, a memorandum on Indian Finance. Steps were taken to frame a Commonwealth Bill. In the general elections devised under the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme, Mrs. Besant favoured entry into the legislature. Some members of the Congress party themselves were dissatisfied with the results flowing from the policy of boycott of legislatures.

The Swarajya Party was formed under the leadership of C. R. Das; and Pandit Motilal Nehru lent his support to it. Mrs Besant, during the currency of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme, went along with B. P. Wadia. D. K. Telang and Jamnadas Dwarkadas and toured round England pleading for Home Rule. She started a branch of the Home Rule League in London with George Lansbury, M. P., as Chairman and John Scurr as Secretary and she was actively helped by persons like the Countess De la Warr, Lady Emily Lutyens, George Bernard Shaw, Mr. and Mrs Phillip Snowden and several others. Many Labour Associations and Trade Unions affiliated themselves to her League. She started a weekly newspaper in England called *United India.* She also published an overseas edition of *New India.*

A meeting attended by 60 members of Parliament was arranged in a Committee Room of the House of Commons at which addresses were given by V. S. Srinivasa Sastri of the Liberal Deputation, M. A. Jinnah of the Muslim League, Mrs. Besant as the representative of the National Home Rule League Deputation and the author as that of the All India Home Rule League. A National Home Rule Deputation visited several cities and towns in England and Scotland and gave political lectures in support of Indian reforms. The following places were visited: London, Southport, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Stratford, Croydon, Battersea, Brighton, Preston, Liverpool, Wellesley, Wigan, Rochdale, Burnby, Bolton, Manchester, Oxford, Bradford, Harrogate, York, Newcastle, Stone, Cardiff, Bristol, Bath, Leeds and Harrow. Articles were written for several London papers, interviews were given to the Press, and generally every opportunity was taken to put India's case before the public. A deputation was received by Mr. Montagu, Secretary of State for India, at the India Office and there was a ladies' deputation organised by Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, which included Mrs. Besant. A great meeting was held in Manchester at which Mrs. Besant spoke; a big meeting was —

held in the Queen's Hall, London, and a lecture in the Kingsway Hall, London, under the auspices of the Fabian Society in support of Indian reforms. Many questions were asked in Parliament by members belonging to the Parliament Committee whose work was to draw the attention of their local M.Ps. to any approaching Indian matter in the House of Commons and urge their attention to it and their votes on the side of reforms, or where needed, redress of wrong governmental action; to influence residents of the locality to write in a similar sense; to circulate information sent to them by the Central Committee; to correct untrue statements about India made in the local Press and write to it in favour of reforms and answer objections; and generally to give help and take any useful action in regard to urging on the British public their duty towards India. About 200 Trade Unions and Labour Organisations were affiliated to the Committee to help the agitation for India's freedom, to put pressure on members of Parliament to vote for India's freedom and Indian interests and to press parliamentary candidates to promise to support Indian freedom and Indian interests. John Scurr took a most prominent part in this endeavour. Meetings were organised in England by several women's societies, the "Britain and India Legue" and various Labour Organisations. Mrs. Besant addressed the famous Pioneer Club, believed to be the first women's society, a Labour Conference at Southport and a meeting of the Home Rule for Scotland League.

In 1919 the Amritsar Congress was held and it marked a great step forward in the Indian agitation. The police excesses in the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar and other events during that year created a terrible unrest in India.

Between the years 1922 and 1924, Mrs. Besant, in the course of the work of the Madras Parliament, framed in consultation with her associates a Swaraj Constitution for India in accordance with the pattern adopted by the several colonies in the British Empire which put forward a draft Constitution

in the course of their campaign for attaining political freedom. This Constitution was put forward before a National Conference in Delhi convened amongst others by Tej Bahadur Sapru, Sivaswami Aiyar, Srinivasa Sastri, Purushotamdas Thakurdas and H. S. Gour, with Mrs. Besant as Secretary. This Conference outlined the essentials of a free Constitution. Mrs. Besant, during the years 1924 and 1929, organised a series of Conferences with the help of men like Sapru and V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, published several pamphlets on self-determination and self-government and the objects of the National Conference and sent out various bulletins over her signature, acting on behalf of these Conferences. In the meantime, the Conservative Government had been defeated in the general elections in England; and the Labour party came into power though its majority was very insecure.

A noteworthy effort was by a National Convention which came into existence in 1924 at Allahabad. A deputation to England was appointed consisting of Mrs. Besant, Lady Emily Lutyens, Sastri and Munshi Iswar Saran. This deputation presented a memorandum to the India Office making a demand for Dominion Home Rule, signed by Mrs. Besant, Sastri, Munshi Iswar Saran, Ali Imam, K. G. Gupta and several others; and it suggested that India should draft her own Constitution as was done by the Dominions and the Irish Free State. A series of meetings were held and a public campaign in England was opened by Bradford. On the 23rd of July 1924, there was a great demonstration in the Queen's Hall in honour of Mrs. Besant's 50th anniversary of entry into public life. Men like Ramsay MacDonald, Lord Haldane, Philip Snowden, Lord Baden-Powell and others associated themselves with the demonstration and with her efforts on behalf of India.

With this background, Mrs. Besant came back to India and made an appeal for a united front of the Congress, the Home Rule League, the Swarajya Party, Liberal Federation, the Muslim League and the Independent Party. When she ap-

proached Gandhiji, he replied that the Congress Constitution had broken down as also the non-co-operation and civil disobedience movements, and therefore he suggested a programme which he considered appropriate and efficacious including concentration on the spinning wheel, on removal of untouchability, and unity among all communities. Mrs. Besant, though she did not agree with Gandhiji's programme, agreed to spin for half an hour a day if non-co-operation and civil disobedience were suspended. But at the Belgaum Congress, non-co-operation and the total rejection of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were decided upon. Thereafter, Mrs. Besant arranged for a United Conference and, after another National Convention, the Commonwealth of India Bill which was framed mainly on the initiative of Mrs. Besant was put into parliamentary form with the assistance of the British Attorney-General, Mr. Slesser.

The Bill was presented by Mr. George Lansbury, M.P., in the British House of Commons and was supported by Mr. Snell, Col. Wedgwood, Mr. Charleston, Mr. Haden Guest, Mr. Walter Baker, Mr. Gillet, Mr. Lees Smith, Mr. James Hudson, Mr. Dalton and Mr. Scurr, and was ordered to be printed by the House of Commons on December 17, 1925. It passed through the First Reading in Parliament. But some of the Congress leaders cabled to England that it was not their Bill. It lapsed in the subsequent session of the British Parliament. In 1929, Mrs. Besant again went to England and arranged for another series of meetings and appeals to England to confer Home Rule on India.

It was on July 2, 1928, that Ramsay MacDonald made the following statement: "I hope that within a period of months, rather than of years, there will be a new Dominion added to the Commonwealth of Nations; I refer to India."

On June 27, 1929, there was a grand demonstration in Free Trade Hall, Manchester, on "Britain's Rule in India—A danger to the peace of the World", organised by the Commonwealth of India League, Manchester, and presided over by George

Lansbury, a Cabinet Minister in which Mrs. Besant, Munshi Iswar Saran, B. Siva Rao, Major Graham Pole and others spoke. It produced a great mental upheaval in England. There was also a "Commonwealth of India" Conference held at Caxton Hall, London, at which Mrs. Besant presided. Many Indians including Munshi Iswar Saran and others took part. A resolution was passed unanimously by the delegates present in favour of "Dominion Status" for India. On June 29, 1929, Mrs. Besant gave a public lecture on the subject of "Dominion Status for India".

There was an All Parties Conference held in Bombay joined by different political parties which appointed a committee to discover ways to draw parties together, to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity and outline a scheme of Swaraj.

Between 1925 and 1929, Mrs. Besant was very active in endeavouring to bring different political parties and leaders together for framing an agreed scheme of Swaraj and creating public opinion to that end, by her articles in the Press, by lectures in different parts of the country and by circulation of literature. A scheme of Swaraj was ultimately drawn up under the guidance of Pandit Motilal Nehru. An All Parties Conference was held at Calcutta in December 1929. Jinnah, representing the Muslim League, was there. M. R. Jayakar was also there, championing the cause of the Hindus. After a few clauses in the scheme were passed, it foundered when it came to the stage of fixing the percentage of Muslim representation in the Central Legislature, Mr. Jayakar, speaking for the Hindus, limiting the percentage to 25 and Mr. Jinnah claiming 30 per cent for Muslims. Mrs. Besant was not particular whether it was 25 or 30 per cent because, after all, 30 per cent was only a minority and would not make any basic difference. The Muslim League's claims were subsequently improved upon and the one point of difference developed into 14 points of difference which subsequently became bitter points of controversy and conflict in the subsequent Round Table Conferences which were held in

London and at which Gandhiji alone represented the Indian National Congress. The Simon Commission was later constituted by the British Government with a wholly British personnel under the Chairmanship of Lord Simon. This body was boycotted both by the Indian National Congress and the National Home Rule League. In spite of differences between the political parties, which stood in the way of framing a Swaraj Constitution for India by Indians, Mrs. Besant continued to carry on her campaign with unabated vigour through the Press, the platform and political organisations.

VI

The Last Years

The successive and melancholy failures to secure self-government for India exacerbated the Indian people. Mahatma Gandhi's influence became paramount and the subsequent history of India is the story of his attempts and heroic struggles to arrive at a mutually honourable adjustment with the British Government and with its representatives in India. It is the story of his apparent failures, of his unabated insistence on complete self-government and of repeated campaigns to rouse and express public opinion by means of the chosen instruments of Satyagraha and non-co-operation. Even his successive failures did not deflect him and his chosen bands of devoted and selfless followers, despite persecution and incarceration before and after the momentous events of 1942—a year which signalised large-scale prosecutions, internments and imprisonments.

The world wars and their several crisis, the revolt threatened by the Indian Military and Naval forces, the growth of world opinion in favour of the enfranchisement of subject peoples, the hardly suppressed irritation of the United States over the failure of England to liberate India and, above all, the devoted self-abnegation of large masses of the Indian people whom Gandhiji's life and example galvanised into unity of thought and aetion in spite of obstacles and suffering—these factors combined with the belated but most remarkable and creditable second thoughts and the basic political maturity of Great Britain brought about a compromise culminating in India's political freedom as a member of the British Common wealth

It was this ideal for which Dr. Besant strove, suffered and battled. She did not live to see this climax as she rapidly lost her health after her disappointments over the Round Table Conferences of 1930, 1931 and 1932 She passed away in 1933.

Her progressive breakdown in health did not, however, affect her faith in India and its destiny; nor did it sour her temper or lessen her serenity or modify her magnificent loyalties to the persons and causes that she deeply loved. As has been remarked in the *Annie Besant Centenary Book* by the present author, "I should like to say a few words for the period of 1928 to 1933, because I regard these years as specially indicative of her spirit. Easy it is, if success blesses us, to possess some facile virtues and to prove and demonstrate them. But it is difficult for one living amidst calumny and obloquy, at all junctures to remain sweet-tempered, patient and forgiving, long-suffering, and yet hopeful of the future. As one who came across Mrs. Besant very often during these years, I can say that I did not see one bitter expression on her face, nor did I hear from her lips one vengeful word. She often said, 'these are times through which India must pass. Having surmounted the present obstacles, she must come to her own. My work is done, but others must fulfil it.' "

Dr. Besant came to India in her 47th year and adopted it as her Motherland. She first took up the religious, philosophical and intellectual sides of the work for India's regeneration. Next, she built up the Central Hindu College as an inspiring centre of Hindu culture. It served as the nucleus of the Hindu University. She helped us in imparting a spiritual basis for reforms in Hindu social customs and habits. She then laid stress on the part that Indian women should play in the new India. She was one of the first to encourage Swadeshi enterprise. Her work for the depressed classes was noteworthy. She was the first to organise and develop the Scout Movement in India. She believed that unless India attained political freedom, she could not speak with authentic voice and authority.

A great deal has been said about Dr. Besant's gifts of leadership: how they were evinced and exercised, not through coercion or by deliberately impressing herself on her contemporaries, but by her complete identification with those who worked with her and for her. She was wholly forgetful of self and loyal, to the uttermost, to her colleagues, co-workers and followers; and such loyalty continued even in the case of those who failed her or proved disloyal to her. As is well-known, she never attributed motives to those who differed from her and even when a well-known Indian political leader from Maharashtra declared that no foreigner could be true to India and likened Dr. Besant to Poothana who offered poisoned milk to Sri Krishna, she never grew bitter but agreed to co-operate, later on, with the same person and with his leader, the great Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who also had criticised her violently.

There were some persons who managed her business affairs for her and were careless almost to the point of unscrupulousness with regard to money matters. When some of Dr. Besant's colleagues and friends warned her against such persons, she not only took no action against them but when she learnt that some of her monies were not accounted for she wrote them off, and never sought to take any action or proceedings against those who had wronged her.

Dr. Bhagavan Das, Prof. G. N. Chakravarthy and several others who had been in the innermost circle of Theosophical workers and were members of the Esoteric section, at one stage in her life when she turned to politics, criticised her bitterly. As Dr. Bhagavan Das himself admitted later on, she never uttered one bitter word or passed any harsh judgment.

Dr. Besant's generosity of judgment and her appreciation of her opponents' point of view were unique. But equally noteworthy and remarkable was her complete disregard of money excepting as an instrument for doing good and procuring happiness. One of the maxims which she continuously followed in practice was to distribute in scholarships, in charitable gifts and

in donations to worthy institutions all the monies that came to her during the course of each year. She had numerous admirers all over the world, who were continuously sending her remittances for use at her discretion. Such persons included many millionaires and leaders of industry and commerce in all parts of the world. One of them, Miss Dodge, who had inherited vast copper mines, used to send her periodically large sums of money. The author of this book is personally aware of the circumstances that, generally speaking, at the end of each year, Dr. Besant used to draw cheques on all the banks in which monies were deposited to her credit and denude herself of all her property. For instance, in the course of two or three successive years, she had passed cheques for over ten lakhs of rupees to build in Madras the Y.M.I.A., to help dozens of students to complete their university courses in England and in America, to start and keep going the weekly *Commonweal* and the daily *New India* which she had started, and generally to finance the Home Rule League. Notwithstanding that she gave away all her monies, the loyalty, respect and veneration that she commanded were such that during almost every year from 1914 to 1931, she was given several lakhs of rupees by various persons from all over the world. She always used to say that "if you do not regard money as possession but as an instrument of service, you will never be in want".

In addition to her generosity in judgment and criticism of others and her lavishness in regard to money matters, Dr. Besant was also a wonderful hostess and took a maternal interest in those who worked for her or with her. When workers in the Theosophical Movement or in the Home Rule League travelled with her during her numerous train journeys throughout the length and breadth of the country, she personally used to prepare coffee and sandwiches for them and was meticulous in seeing to their bodily comfort and accommodation. She stood in *loco parentis* to successive groups of persons who worked for her in the religious, educational and political spheres. George S.

Arundale, the great educationist and public worker who succeeded her as President of the Theosophical Society, C. Jinarajadasa, the Buddhist scholar and writer whom she and Leadbeater helped to educate, Dr. Bhagavan Das, the great Sanskrit scholar, writer and public worker who collaborated with her in her educational work and with whose help she translated and edited the *Bhagavad Gita* and other works, G. N. Chakravarthy, the profound thinker and Theosophical leader, the Telangs, sons of the great Bombay Judge, were all Dr. Besant's devoted adherents and helped her in her work. B. P. Wadia, the fiery spirit who joined her as a young man and afterwards led the labour movement and Home Rule activities and also collaborated in her journalistic work, Trilokekar and Sanjeeva Rao, Iqbal Narayan Gurtu, and many others who carried out their great educational work under the directions of Dr. Besant and George Arundale—these are some of the names of persons who practically formed part of Dr. Besant's family and whom she encouraged, tended, supported and stood by through good and evil report and through all difficulties and complicated situations. Similarly Miss Dodge, Mrs. Bright and Mr. Graham Pole were people who followed Dr. Besant in her various activities and loyally supported her.

In reply to the tributes paid to her in 1924 at a meeting held at the Queen's Hall, London, by persons who assembled to do honour to her, like Ramsay MacDonald, Lord Haldane, Lord Baden-Powell, Ben Turner, Philip Snowden, Haden Guest, Mrs. Pethick Lawrence and others, Dr. Besant replied as follows:

"Some have spoken tonight about work, about sacrifice. But I wonder whether all of you know, as I know, now that my body is old, that there is no joy like the joy of sacrifice for a great cause! That there is no sorrow in it, but the bliss which comes from the privilege of working for that which is greater than one's self....for the God who unfolds within us, pushes us onward even when our eyes are blinded to His Glory, and it is He who is the only worker, He who is the only Sacrifice, He

who living in our hearts is the only inspiration to Service: and just as we come to know that that is true, then it is that we know that nothing that our bodies and our brains and our hearts can do is our work at all, for all work is His alone and there is none other. And we realise that we work in His power and He is never weak in His strength. And I would say to every one of you that that power dwells within you and that strength of the divine spirit, and the body is only the temple of Living God."

These sentences are a fit epitome of her outlook on life in her later years, and serve also as a moving finale to the story of her life.

VII

Some Reminiscences

In the foregoing life sketch, the main currents of thought and the events appertaining to Dr. Besant's life and marvellous career have been set out. But this monograph would not be complete and self-contained without putting on record an *apercu* of the numerous activities that signalised her pilgrimage through life. I have, therefore, included in this chapter the personal reminiscences and sketches contributed by some of her colleagues and admirers from all over the world who have either participated in one or more aspects of her work or have borne testimony to the services rendered by her in fields as far apart as the organisation of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides movements and the initiation of Shrimati Rukmini Devi into the study and practice of the Russian ballet dance and, thereafter, of classical Bharata Natyam. These accounts will demonstrate the amazing variety of Dr. Besant's interests and the pioneering work which she attempted and carried out in many directions and which formed part of her programme to strive for an all-round renaissance of India—cultural, educational and political, and ultimately spiritual and religious.

The author of this monograph met her in the first decade of the 20th century. By that time she had made India her home and adopted the Indian costume as well as most Indian habits. A silk saree and an embroidered shawl were her characteristic dress and even during her sixties, her appearance was that of a vivid and dominating personage. Her head has been described as leonine and her self-assured poise was a special feature.

She used few gestures in her public speaking, and her strength lay in her matchless voice; none could rival the range, the quiet sense of power or the resonance of that voice. When delivering her public speeches, she ascended the platform at the appointed time without a minute's delay, and, generally, she ended her speeches exactly on the expiration of 60 minutes. She began in a low tone but gradually her voice rose to a higher pitch and it had a resonance which made Mr. Gladstone declare that there was only one European orator to rival her, namely, Senor Castelar of Spain. The clarion-like reverberation of her words was such that at a time when microphones and loud-speakers were not in existence, she could be heard with ease by a crowded audience of 5,000 or more, and yet she seemed not to strain her voice at all. Its harmony and ringing character seemed to pervade every part of a large hall. Almost exactly after the expiry of 52 or 53 minutes from the commencement she began her peroration which rose to great altitudes both of oratory and of delivery. She sat down as quietly at the end of her speech as when she entered the hall punctually to the second. In the days when she acted as her own lawyer in the English and Indian Courts as well as when she spoke on political or on religious subjects both her matter and her manner were unapproachable, in their power to convince. Her face and demeanour during her public utterances were characterised by a rapt look and a compelling presence.

In social life among friends or followers she functioned as a charming hostess. In small gatherings and in an intimate environment there was a complete transformation of the dynamic public figure into an unaffected and ebullient comrade anxious to please and easily pleased, and the sternness of glance which marked her public appearances changed into an engaging softness. All the same, she was not easily moved to laughter nor had she the gift of humour in any marked degree. As one of her critical contemporaries observed. "She can be majestic, she can be condescending and she can be pleasant but she did not

possess the gift of laughter nor could she appreciate the light badinage of society conversation."

Mr. Arthur Nethercot's recent biographical sketch. *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant*, dealing with the earlier period of Mrs. Besant's life is amply documented but, following Lytton Strachey's methods, the author prefers to put the sceptical or uncharitable rather than a comprehending and sympathetic construction on events and conduct. He is apt to be Freudian in his analysis of her friendships though, as in the case of Bernard Shaw's association with Mrs. Besant, he acquits her of all blame. Mr. V. S. PRITCHETT, in the course of his review of Mr. Nethercot's book in the *New Statesman*, says:

We forget to what batterings against bishops, judges and politicians, to what riots, mass meetings, nagging lectures and sectarian rows, we owe the liberties we now take for granted. For Annie Besant's short part in them—it lasted less than 20 years—we must greatly respect her. But what was it that drove the young, agonisingly pious, pretty, prim, lady-like young wife of a narrow country clergyman to a notorious career? It was, some have thought, the very excess of her concern with religion in girlhood that turned her into an atheist; certainly sexual shock made her leave home and start thinking and fending for herself.

The early photographs tell us something more. As a woman she is a boyish beauty. The little figure is determined and stubborn if it is also seductive; the eyes brim—but with will rather than with passion.

During the height of the Free Thought Movement, GERALD MASSEY, the English poet, wrote the following lines:

You for others sow the grain;
Yours the tears of ripening rain;
Theirs the smiling harvest gain.
You have soul enough for seven;
Life enough the earth to leaven;
Love enough to create Heaven.
One of God's own faithful few;
Whilst unknowing it are you;
Annie Besant, bravely true.

MR. KANJI DWARKADAS, the well-known social and political worker and devoted follower of Dr. Besant, writes thus of her political work from 1917 in which he took an active part as an associate :

When Annie Besant was interned by the Madras Government in Ootacamund in June 1917, Umar Sobani, Shankarlal Banker, Indulal Yagnik, Jamnadas Dwarkadas and myself approached Gandhiji for assistance to get Mrs. Besant released. Then Gandhiji started his first talk of Passive Resistance and suffering in India. He asked us to collect 100 volunteers, true and faithful, to walk from Bombay to Coimbatore (about 1,000 miles) and he said this would help in her release. We were sceptical about this kind of political agitation and nothing came out of it. Mrs. Besant's internment shook political India and in June 1917 began the mass awakening of India. Thousands joined the Home Rule League all over the country and among the most prominent leaders who did so were Motilal Nehru, Tej Bahadur Sapru and M. A. Jinnah.

Dr. Subramania Iyer, ex-Chief Justice of Madras and Vice-President of the Theosophical Society, wrote a letter to President Wilson and it was smuggled out of India in spite of heavy censorship. Dr. Subramania Iyer drew President Wilson's attention to the British misrule in India. President Wilson promptly acted on this letter and asked the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, to explain to him what was happening to India. This had the desired effect and world opinion along with Indian public opinion forced the British Government to release Dr. Besant. She brought political India on the map of the world, and the Secretary of State for India, Montagu, came to India to discuss with Indian leaders the future Government of India.

Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy, insisted that Montagu should not see the Indian leaders all by himself and that Chelmsford and Montagu both together should meet them.

But Montagu found a way out of this difficulty. Charles Roberts, M.P., had come along with Montagu to help him. He asked Mrs. Besant to see him (Charles Roberts). Hardly had

Mrs. Besant shaken hands with Charles Roberts and sat down when Montagu dropped in as if by accident. Charles Roberts walked out of the room and Montagu had over an hour's talk with Annie Besant.

The very first non-official who met Lord Reading in Bombay was Annie Besant in 1921. Lord Reading had specially suggested that she should meet him on the very day of his taking office and she had come down from Adyar to meet him. Immediately on her return after her talk with Lord Reading at the Bombay Government House, I lunched with her. Lord Reading told her that he had come with a blank cheque from Lloyd George and the British Government with full authority to settle the political problems with India and he hoped to see India happy and contented before he finished his five-year term as Viceroy. Lord Reading attributed the main political trouble in India to Amritsar (Jallianwalla Bagh) outrages and massacre, and he told Mrs. Besant that he would do his best to compensate for the actions of Michael O'Dwyer and General Dyer. Reading asked for Annie Besant's help in putting matters right in India.

Gandhiji had four meetings with Lord Reading lasting 14 hours. Lala Lajpat Rai, Congress President, met him for four hours; and Mrs. Besant for one and a half hours. Lord Reading told Mrs. Besant of his talks with Gandhiji.

By 1923, Mrs. Besant had developed the idea of holding a National Convention to draft the Commonwealth of India Bill. The Constituent Assembly of 1946 did the work of drafting the Constitution of India on the lines suggested by Annie Besant in 1923.

On January 24, 1925, Mrs. Besant gave a copy of the Draft Commonwealth of India Bill to Lord Reading in New Delhi.

The Commonwealth of India Bill, passed by the National Convention on April 25, 1925, in Kanpur, was finally drafted by Rt. Hon. Arthur Henderson, Under-Secretary of State for India in Attlee's Government from 1945 onwards and son of the great Arthur Henderson, Foreign Secretary in Ramsay Mac-

Donald's first Cabinet.

It must be noted that C. R. Das had supported Mrs. Besant when she had opposed Gandhiji's non-co-operation resolution in September 1920 at the special session of the Congress.

In May 1925, C. R. Das sent a message from Darjeeling to Mrs. Besant in Madras that he wanted to see her, he must see her, but he was too ill to leave Darjeeling, would she please go and see him there. Within a few hours of her getting this telegram, Mrs. Besant was on her way to Darjeeling.

C. R. Das told Mrs. Besant: "You were right. I have smashed the Montagu reforms. I have defeated Lord Lytton, voted out his Ministry in Bengal. I have won but as you had said this has been a negative victory. Tell me what I should do now. I have got into a blind alley. Please take me out." Mrs. Besant replied: "This will take you out and we can work together." And she handed over to him the Commonwealth of India Bill. C. R. Das discussed the Bill with Gandhiji at Darjeeling and wrote a letter to Mrs. Besant in which he conveyed to her their views about the Commonwealth Bill.

George Lansbury introduced the Commonwealth of India Bill as a private Bill in the House of Commons and Ramsay MacDonald, speaking in the House of Commons and flourshing the Conmmonwealth of India Bill which he was holding in his hand, said on June 2, 1928: "I hope that, within a period of months rather than years, there will be a new Dominion added to the Commonwealth of our Nations, a Dominion of another race, a Dominion that will find self-respect as an equal within the Commonwealth: I refer to India."

DR. G. S. ARUNDALE, a born teacher and youth leader, was closely associated with Dr. Besant's educational work in Benares and elsewhere and succeeded her as President of the Theosophical Society. He declares:

Mrs. Besant wanted the students of the Central Hindu College and Collegiate School to be good students. She wanted

them to be good at sports of all kinds. But above all she wanted them to be gentlemen in the finest sense of the term....I do not think she had a greater pleasure during her association with the Central Hindu College than when a Director General of Education in India wrote that the students of the college and school had good manners and were gentlemen....And she was ever emphatic that graciousness, courtesy, reverence, friendliness, compassion, service, and, where expedient, sacrifice, understanding, dignity, grace—these were the vital subjects of education, and must always come first, must always have pre-eminence over all other elements of education.

It was justly remarked of Dr. Besant that she was not only a patron of art but she was herself an embodiment of the artistic life. She dressed simply but with infinite taste and soon after she made India her home, she adopted Indian modes of life, Indian diet, Indian habits and Indian dress. SRIMATI RUKMINI DEVI (whose father, as ardent follower of Dr. Besant, entrusted to her care Sri Ram who worked as her Assistant for many years and who is now the President of the Theosophical Society, Srimati Sivakamu who was also trained by Dr. Besant and by George Arundale in Benares and who became a well-known doctor, and Srimati Rukmini Devi herself) says in an article in the *Annie Besant Centenary Book*:

If I work for Art today, it is due to the understanding education that she gave. I was much with her, and used to watch the great joy she experienced whenever she saw anything beautiful, a coolie woman with a bright coloured Sari, a little brass cooking vessel, or a piece of embroidery. Her great pleasure infected me with the desire to watch everyday things and I remember one occasion when we three, she, Dr. Arundale and I, were walking together, and we all stopped and for at least half an hour studied the men who were drawing water for the coconut trees. I saw then the graceful dark forms of the Indian working men.

Mrs. Besant did not generally like ballroom dancing or jazz. In those days no one thought of an Indian woman dancing. I had just seen Anna Pavlova, and I was full of inspiration. It was in 1925 and we were all travelling together. I remarked

that I would like to dance. Everyone around me was shocked and said "what an idea?'. She smiled and said, "I think it will be a beautiful thing to see Rukmini dancing." In 1928 before I even studied dancing, I was asked to produce a variety entertainment (which description I intensely dislike) for the 1st of October, her birthday. She brought many of her friends, and Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar was sitting next to her. I produced Tennyson's Queen Guinevere as well as a little temple scene of Kwan-Yin, the Chinese World-Mother.

My art movement began on her birthday. On my programme were printed the names of actors and Mrs. Annie Besant's recitation. My first earning went to the animals and the poor whom she loved and whom I love.

My art movement began on her birthday. On my programme sculptors, poets and painters have been inspired by someone who is an embodiment of Art. For me, my inspirer has been and continues to be mother Annie Besant; while others were sceptical and were shocked at the idea of my dancing, she was pleased and saw a future for me through it. In 1931, very near the end of her days. I gave a programme of dancing. She could not come, and many who came spoke in horror. She sent for me and said that it was such a disappointment for her not to have been able to come down, and would I dance for her in her room! I did; and this inspired me never to think anything of public opinion. She used to say that the revival of Indian Art is one of the great things of the future and that she felt sorry she could neither sing nor paint! But she used to play the piano and C. W. Leadbeater, who had heard her, said to me, "If she was not a great statesman and orator, she could still be one of the greatest singers, actresses or pianists in the world," for, he said, "her knowledge of music is great, her voice is beautiful and her touch on the piano was equal to any of the greatest pianists of the day."

The most important attribute of an artist is Intuition. This she had in everything in life. What surprised many of us was

her taste in Indian music. Though she did not know it technically she was able to contact the spirit of it. It is impossible to enumerate the number of ways in which she encouraged Art and artists. In 1916, when the two sisters Eleanor and Kathleen Elder were filling Adyar with Greek dance, I remember the occasion when she sent for them, and they returned with their arms filled with silver gifts. She was so grateful to them for bringing beauty into the lives of so many.

In 1921, when Mrs. Besant founded the 1921 Club at the Gokhale Hall, she opened an Art Section and regularly attended its meetings. She was always the gracious hostess to many world-famous artists like Rabindranath Tagore, who nearly always stayed in Adyar, and to Sarojini Naidu, Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Leopold Stocowski and others. Her Kamala Lectures in 1924 at the Calcutta University contained a great masterpiece of exposition of Indian Art and History. She was greatly interested in the birth of the Bengal school of painting, and encouraged exhibitions of Indian paintings everywhere, and gave support to all who worked for this cause. Her tribute in this cause went chiefly to J. H. Cousins. In this way was Dr. Besant a mother of many Art movements in India, and the birth of Kalakshetra itself owes its origin to her.

To Annie Besant, Art and Religion were one. To a great yogi, who has the vision of the highest, beauty and wisdom are one.

When Rukmini Devi decided to marry George S. Arundale, her parents were, to a certain extent, taken aback; but they resolved to place the matter before Dr. Besant and to accept for advice implicitly. After considerable thought, she gave her blessing to the marriage and, in this matter, as in many others, she became the object of intense public criticism from many quarters which disliked the idea of a young girl of sixteen marrying an Englishman who was also much older than herself. Dr. Besant was a practical social reformer although she never made any fuss about her convictions or her programme.

There are some aspects of Dr. Besant's contact with DR. BHAGAVAN DAS, which deserve special mention. He says:

Deep as my love and reverence were for her whom I had

recognised as my spiritual mother from the moment I first beheld her, even I had the misfortune of becoming engaged in a public controversy with her in 1912-13 on the affairs and the policies of the Central Hindu College and the Theosophical Society, in both of which I happened to be entrusted with executive offices. When the controversy had blown over I humbly begged her forgiveness, not for my differing views but for any harshness that might have crept into my language in the heat of argument; and she assured me of complete forgiveness, already generously given long ago before my asking—as was indeed clear from the fact that, even during the period of controversy, her personal kindness to me continued in every way as ever before.

Once I fell very ill with malaria. She was, as usual, very busy with all kinds of work, and, besides, was preparing to leave Benares for England for the summer. One morning, on coming back to my senses after a night's mind-wandering I was astounded to learn that she had passed nearly the whole of the night on a sofa, near my sick-bed, taking turns with my wife in trying to soothe my wretched, worthless mind and body.

PANDIT MADAN MOHAN MALAVIYA, who differed from Dr. Besant in many matters, even in the educational sphere, thus describes the services of Dr. Besant to Indian education:

Dr. Annie Besant was one of the celebrities of the modern world. India owes a special debt to her. She rendered very valuable services to the cause of education, the study of religion and also to the cause of India's freedom. Along with her fellow workers, she founded the Central Hindu College at Benares in 1898 and heartily co-operated in establishing the Benanes Hindu University. She was an esteemed member of the Court, the Council, the Senate and various other bodies of the University since its inception. The University honoured itself by conferring upon Dr. Besant the degree of Doctor of

Letters in 1921. We cherish her memory with deep gratitude and affection.

In continuation of what Pandit Malaviya has stated, the following words of SRINIVASA SASTRI may be borne in mind:

I remember it as if it was today how after she had laboured for the Central Hindu College, Benares, with her abundant energy for a great many years, having brought it up to a very high level of efficiency, having made it certain that her great religious ideals would be followed more or less, having secured for that college a body of very efficient and highly cultured professors and teachers, when the time came for the Benares University to be founded she quietly surrendered the college into the hands of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya knowing that the torch that she had lighted would continue to burn in his hands. I was not, as I have said, a follower of Dr. Besant; I was one of those who watched her advent into politics in this country with some misgiving. She was already known for her gigantic energy. It was known of her that what she took up she worked into a great channel for the flow of all her superabundant energy and our old people, the politicians of the day, liked to work quietly. They therefore looked with suspicion on the advent into politics of this lady, who knew no rest herself and would not give any rest to her colleagues, and certainly none to the authorities. So when she started the Home Rule League there was a great deal of trepidation amongst those who had the management of politics in their hands. They tried to see that the Home Rule League did not come at all into existence, or only in such a weak and unattractive form that they could feel secure in their own power. I have to confess that I too was filled with the same misgiving and that when she took up the Home Rule League I ventured to raise my voice against its establishment. The Home Rule League was started. It roused the enthusiasm of the young in all parts of the country, and

while it lasted it was a power in the land and did a great deal of useful very efficient service. For a foreigner to be endowed with her spirit and actuated with her longing for a great many years was a wonderful thing; but in addition she did a great deal to add to the culture and philosophy of India, to make religion better than it was. That she lived to be a great teacher in this country and that hundreds of thousands heard her, read her writings, and were glad to learn of their own philosophy from her, is tribute to her greatness and her power, second to none that I can think of.

MR. SRI PRAKASA, who was a student in the Central Hindu College, Benares, makes these observations regarding another aspect of Dr. Besant's character:

Another characteristic of Mrs. Besant, forcibly printed on my mind, is her capacity not only of attracting people, but of keeping them bound to her in chains of unbreakable affection. She would never neglect a friend. She would cling to him despite his weakness, his limitations and even his unkindness. It was this generosity of her nature which enabled her to make herself win friends and keep them attached to her work. It was—so it strikes me as I throw my mind backwards—the root of her success. She was able to build up her great institutions by making all her friends and colleagues feel all the time that they were doing her work, that she was constantly looking at them, admiring, helping and encouraging them throughout. She was full of praise of her friends and had not any unkind thought or word for them at any time, whatever befell.

The first thing that must have impressed her was that though she herself came full of admiration for our country's ancient codes of life and thought, and though she herself was very well versed in the legends of our gods and goddesses, and stories of our heroes and heroines, the educated persons she met were not only ignorant about these matters but actually looked askance

at them. They regarded everything old and sacred of their own traditions as sheer superstition and insensate folly. They felt that nothing could save them and their country except imitating Western ways. Mrs. Besant would certainly have thought in her mind that this wave of scepticism and so-called modernism needed to be immediately stemmed, and men's minds restored to an appreciation of their traditions and a love for the great achievements of their ancestors, so that they might imbibe in themselves that pride and that self-respect which alone can make a people great.

The second thing that is bound to have struck her was that, while on the one hand, persons who regarded themselves as educated were becoming cheap imitations of Western peoples, and were aping foreign ways, on the other there were important elements in society that could be called orthodox and that were very frightened at the trend of events, who were actually withdrawing themselves in a shell of their own creation, feeling that everything was lost; that nothing could save their culture from total destruction; and that by keeping themselves aloof from the world and its activities, they could at least save their own souls which they prized above everything else. Mrs. Besant must have resolved in her mind that this pessimism must be fought, and these people told that nothing was really lost unless they themselves were determined to lose it, and that the country could still be saved if they would only make the necessary efforts, so that she might make her own proper contributions to world thought and world endeavour, which would redound to her glory and be of genuine assistance to all mankind.

Then there was the third and overriding factor of foreign domination. She saw what was obvious, that her own people held us under their political subjection and rode roughshod over the feelings of everyone. They ruled the country in their own interest and violated all her own and her country's principles of justice, freedom and propriety. She is bound to have

determined in her own mind that, even if she were to receive the opprobrium and hostility of her countrymen, she would help to bring back freedom to the great people who had done such wonders in the past, but who lay helplessly under the heel of a foreign power, because of which alone the two previously mentioned phenomena—scepticism towards the ancient and imitation of the modern, of some, and pessimism and despair, of others—were possible.

Mrs. Besant fought on all these three fronts in her own way. To the educated, she preached with an eloquence that was unsurpassed, that India was once great and shall be great in the future as well; that she had ever been the teacher of mankind; that spiritual verities were superior to material success; that persons with education owed a high and sacred duty by their country; and that they could neglect their great responsibilities only at their peril. It was not a small thing that a person with a white body—and that meant much those days—said all that she did; and thousands gathered round her to listen to her. They felt a glow of pride in their ancestors. They took a pledge that they would create a new India worthy of her past and capable of holding her own in the world of the future. This great work Mrs. Besant did by her endless tours throughout the length and breadth of the country, speaking from a hundred platforms and reaching hundreds of thousands of men and women all over the land.

To break the solid wall of reactionary orthodoxy that pretended to follow the past without understanding it, and refused to look at the present, unaware of its achievements and its possibilities, she opened her chain of educational institutions in which the teaching of our ancient religion was compulsory, only the same was taught in an enlightened manner. Through these institutions she also tried, by methods of love and persuasion, to introduce social reform which took the orthodox out of their narrowness, and led them to sympathise with current ways of thought. All this successfully induced them

to accept the good that lay in many modern ways, and, at the same time, to keep fast to the ancient moorings of their traditional thought and life.

MR. F. G. PEARCE, who helped Dr. Besant in her educational work and the Scout Movement, has thus described her activities :

So far as I know, Mrs. Besant's interest in the Scout Movement was first aroused as a part of the fight for the rights of Indians, though I am certain that the basic idea of scouting for boys (and girls) was one which appealed to her also as an educationist. Her direct and active participation in the development of the Scout Movement throughout India came about in the following way. In 1916 I arranged for a promising student of mine, G. P. Aryaratna, to join the Madanapalle Theosophical College, for higher studies. I was at that time Colonial Commissioner of the Baden-Powell Boy Scouts Association in Ceylon, and Aryaratna was not only one of my best pupils in Mahinda College, Galle (one of the Buddhist Theosophical colleges started by Colonel Olcott, to which Mrs. Besant had sent me as Vice-Principal in 1913) but he was also one of the keenest and ablest members of my Scout troop, the first Galle Troop. It was hardly a matter of more than a few months before Aryaratna had organised scouting in Madanapalle and the First Madanapalle Troop began that long career of usefulness to the college and to the whole neighbourhood for which it justly became famous (as my friends C. S. Trilokekar and J. H. Cousins—Principals of the College at various times—can testify). As soon as the Madanapalle Scouts were on a sound footing, Aryaratna applied to the London Headquarters of the Baden-Powell Scouts Association for the affiliation of the Troop. No difficulty was anticipated, for we had obtained recognition of the Ceylon Scout troops (comprising almost entirely Ceylonese boys) without question.

and practically all the Ceylon Scout officers were Ceylonese. To our amazement, Baden-Powell declined to affiliate the Madanapalle troop on the grounds that the number of British officers in the Scout Movement in India was insufficient to justify the extension of scouting among Indians during the war. The moment Mrs. Besant heard of this she was up in arms. She regarded it (very rightly, I think) as yet another insult flung at India by people whose racial superiority complex made them imagine that a movement for training young people in health, enterprise, good citizenship, and service could not be properly organised by Indians without foreign supervision. With the help of Tarini P. Sinha and K. Sanjiva Kamath, Mrs. Besant founded the Indian Boy Scout Association in 1917.

MR. J. H. Cousins, in his younger days, produced passionate verses in support of the Irish Home Rule Movement; and he and his wife, Margaret Cousins, the great Feminist and Suffragist leader, became ardent disciples of Dr. Besant. They worked under her in the Madanapalle College and in the Central Hindu College, Benares, and cooperated with her in all her educational programmes, became ardent supporters of the Home Rule Movement; and in their devotion to art and the renaissance of Indian painting and patronage of Indian artists, they did wonderful work. They were the first to acknowledge that all the inspiration and support for their work was derived from Dr. Besant.

Lady Emily Lutyens, Miss Arundale and others too numerous to mention from all over the world, practically dedicated their lives, their properties and their endeavours to such uses as Dr. Besant suggested or inspired.

MR. SRI RAM, one of Dr. Besant's ardent followers and now President of the Theosophical Society, has summarised her political ideals thus :

The late Lord Haldane once paid a tribute to Dr. Besant as a great statesman of her time. Lord Haldane was himself a man of that class and a deep philosophical thinker. The constructive qualities of Dr. Besant's mind have nowhere been more strikingly displayed than in the Commonwealth of India Bill, of which she was the principal architect and in the whole

effort that culminated in that Bill. In 1923, now nearly a quarter of a century ago, almost immediately after the coming into force of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and the collapse of Mr. Gandhi's first Non-Co-operation movement, she started the idea of Self-determination for India, and with much hard work created an all-parties organisation, first called the National Conference and later the National Convention, to implement that idea. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru was the Chairman of that body, and she herself as the General Secretary carried on her shoulders the Herculean task of trying to turn the minds of the people into a constructive effort to settle the political problem once for all by a measure of India's relations with Britain on a footing of complete freedom for India and equal partnership in the affairs of the Commonwealth.

MR. A. RANGASWAMI AIYAR of Madurai, a stalwart among the followers of Dr. Besant, describes the development of her political programme as follows:

In the beginning of her life in India, Dr. Besant declined to enter the political field. She recognised that the awakening of India's national life should be based on religion and spirituality. She worked incessantly to present the truths of Hindu religion in modern garb in order to carry conviction to the minds of present-day people trained to examine all problems from the intellectual point of view. In order to train the younger generation to feel proud of the glorious heritage of their ancestors, to fill them with a lofty sense of patriotism and love for their Motherland, and to inspire them to serve and sacrifice for the restoring of her greatness and glory, she became the founder and pioneer of Indian National Education. As India was peopled by the followers of all the great religions of the world, she preached the Brotherhood of Religions and the common source from which they have originated and the common basis underlying them all. She aimed at making the younger generation not only proud of their country and its past

achievements, but also to lead well-disciplined lives, to build a strong and noble character, and to devote their talents to the service of their country. She found that there were fissiparous tendencies endangering the rise of a united nation, and, like a far-sighted statesman, she recognised the necessity for bridging the widening gulf between the Hindu and the Mussalman which was accentuated by the communal electorates created during Lord Minto's viceroyalty; and she emphasised the recognition of the Brotherhood of Religions as a great solvent for the discord and differences in Indian social and political life. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya was insistent upon securing a Charter for a Hindu University, though he did not have a constituent College which would be a preliminary requisite for the founding of a Hindu University. As the British Government were not likely to agree to the chartering of two Universities and as she considered that one denominational Hindu University was better than none, she gave her Central Hindu College as the constituent College of the University. The foundation of a Hindu University at Benares gave an impetus to the foundation of a Muslim University at Aligarh. As Dr. Besant feared, these two denominational Universities could not but breed separative tendencies. In this as in many of her actions, Dr. Besant showed her statesmanship, and played the part of a practical idealist though her views did not often prevail against the lack of political insight and the obscurantism of some of the other national workers. After placing her religious and educational work on a sound basis, Dr. Besant turned her attention to the reform of social abuses, especially infant marriage and the extortion of bride-monies.

The First World War began in 1914, and Dr. Besant, though proclaiming that the allied nations would achieve success even though external indications at that time were to the contrary, stressed that the price of that victory should be the achievement of India's freedom if the results were to be permanent and avoid future wars, and stressed the right of India to

work for her freedom even though England was in difficulties. In December 1915, when the session of the Indian National Congress was held in Bombay, she called a meeting of the Congress leaders and announced her determination to unfurl the flag of "Indian Home Rule". The leaders were startled, fearing that the association of that ominous name in connection with the fight for Irish freedom would bring a similar trend of events in the smooth and placid waters in the Indian political stream and eyed her advent as that of a stormy petrel portending unwelcome disturbances within the near political horizon. They said they would take the movement for Indian freedom into their own hands and guide it in their own ways. She gave them till the 1st October following for their due action, after which date if they did not act, she would start her Home Rule movement.

September 3, 1916, came but no action on the part of the Congress leaders was visible. On that day she founded the Home Rule League for India. Indian political activities entered a new phase of vibrant life under her leadership. At the Lucknow Congress of 1916 the Hindu and Muslim leaders were led to unite, and the Lucknow pact, though disfigured by communal electorates and weightages for minorities, was entered into for the attainment of India's freedom; as Dr. Besant foresaw, without unity freedom could not be attained. Dr. Besant's political activities during her Home Rule campaign brought repeated forfeitures of security by her paper *New India*, accompanied by battles in the law courts waged by her in defence of her cause which was widely popularised thereby. Her internment with G. S. Arundale and B. P. Wadia raised tremendous enthusiasm throughout the country for the cause of Home Rule, at the height of which she was made President of the Congress session in 1917 in Calcutta.

Mrs. Besant's method to attain freedom for India was by way of intense and well-organised constitutional agitation, educating the masses politically, and seeking their enthusiastic

support for the cause, and presenting in the name of the united Indian Nation a Swaraj constitution suited to Indian genius and Indian conditions which the sanction of the Indian people behind it would compel the British Parliament to pass. At this stage Mr. Gandhi entered the political field, assuring that Swaraj would be won with his weapon of "Satyagraha" or "Civil Disobedience" of laws in order to hamper and bring to a deadlock the functioning of Government activities. Dr. Besant was strongly against civil disobedience as she felt it would lead to disturbances and bloodshed, as the masses would get out of hand; and she strongly advocated the British connection and India's place as an equal member in the British Commonwealth leading ultimately to a common Government Federation for the whole world. Mr. Gandhi's method was more spectacular and, caught the popular fancy, and Mrs. Besant's practical idealism was set aside.

MR. B. SIVA RAO, the well-known journalist legislator, political worker and writer speaks of Dr. Besant's political work in these terms:

Dr. Besant's active participation in Indian politics synchronised with the commencement of the First World War. For a period of 15 years thereafter she dominated the political scene, contributing and subsequently working out, with thoroughness and precision, two great conceptions which all progressive forces in the country immediately accepted as of vital importance. These conceptions were first, Home Rule for India as a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations; and second, when the goal of responsible government was accepted by Mr. Lloyd George's Cabinet at the end of the war, the principle of self-determination for India—a Constitution framed for India by Indians.

In the middle of the world war (in 1916) when India's leading politicians were thinking modestly in terms of a fresh political advance on the basis of the Minto-Morley Reforms

then in operation, Dr. Besant came out with the striking slogan of Home Rule for India. It captured the imagination of the younger generation which rallied round her as the leader of a new movement. Brushing aside the legalistic approach characteristic of the lawyer-politician of that generation she built up for the Home Rule League an emotional mass support. The Indian National Congress and its auxiliary the Home Rule League became, under her inspiring leadership, instruments for carrying the message of Home Rule as our birthright to remote villages as much as to India's urban population.

Her technique was instructive. In the early stages of the Home Rule movement, the Moderates, apprehensive of the pace she was setting for India's political progress, placed themselves in opposition to the demand for Home Rule. She became the centre of an intense, if somewhat controversial, agitation for a British declaration promising India complete self-governnment. Internment not only proved ineffective, but provided a powerful stimulus for the movement. A British declaration came associated with Mr. Montagu, towards the end of the war, "for the progressive realisation of responsible government through the increasing association of Indians with the administration."

It sounded a feeble, half-hearted response to India's passionate plea for equality of status. "Unworthy of Britain to offer and of India to accept" was Dr. Besant's first reaction. Then followed numerous conferences and deputations and two years of negotiations and detailed discussions—all intended to improve upon and enlarge the scope of the British declaration. She remained a critic, as long as there was the least hope of securing a more liberal scheme from the Lloyd George Cabinet. When the phase of negotiations finally came to an end and the scheme was ready for introduction, she became a discriminating supporter.

SHRIMATI SAROJINI NAIDU has stated as follows:

Today, pondering over her incomparable devotion and her

incalculable service to the Indian cause, I can pay no finer tribute to her manifold greatness than to acclaim the sweet miracle wrought by her transcendent and transfiguring love for India, whereby she, who came into our midst a stranger, has created for herself an honoured and legitimate place in the annals of the glorious and heroic women of our own race and tradition.

In 1956 PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU sent the following message to the Theosophical Lodge at New Delhi:

I send my greetings on the occasion of the birthday of Mrs. Annie Besant. To the younger generation today, she might be just a name. To my generation and to an earlier one, she was a tremendous figure who influenced us greatly. There can be no doubt that in India's struggle for freedom, her part was a considerable one. Apart from this, she was one of those persons who drew our attention to our own heritage and made us proud of it.

Appendix

Excerpts from Mrs. Annie Besant's Presidential Address at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1917

FELLOW-DELEGATES AND FRIENDS:

Everyone who has preceded me in this chair has rendered his thanks in fitting terms for the gift which is truly said to be the highest that India has it in her power to bestow. It is the sign of her fullest love, trust, and approval, and the one whom she seats in that chair is for his year of service, her chosen leader. But if my predecessors found fitting words for their gratitude in what words can I voice mine, whose debt to you is so overwhelmingly greater than theirs? For the first time in Congress history, you have chosen as your President one who, when your choice was made, was under the heavy ban of Government displeasure, and who lay interned as a person dangerous to public safety. While I was humiliated, you crowned me with honour; while I was slandered, you believed in my integrity and good faith; while I was crushed under the heel of bureaucratic power you acclaimed me as your leader; while I was silenced and unable to defend myself you defended me, and won for me release. I was proud to serve in lowliest fashion, but you lifted me up and placed me before the world as your chosen representative. I have no words with which to thank you, no eloquence with which to repay my debt. My deeds must speak for me, for words are too poor. I turn your gift into service to the Motherland; I consecrate my life anew to her in worship by action. All that I have and am, I lay on the

Altar of the Mother and together we shall cry, more by service than by words: VANDE MATARAM!

There is, perhaps, one value in your election of me in this crisis of India's destiny, seeing that I have not the privilege to be Indian-born, but come from that little island in the northern seas which has been, in the West, the builder-up of free institutions. The Aryan emigrants, who spread over the lands of Europe, carried with them the seeds of liberty sown in their blood in their Asian cradleland. Western historians trace the self-rule of the Saxon villages to their earlier prototypes in the East, and see the growth of English liberty as up-springing from the Aryan root of the free and self-contained village communities.

Its growth was crippled by Norman feudalism there, as its millennia-nourished security here was smothered by the East India Company. But in England it burst its shackles and nurtured a liberty-loving people and a free Commons' House. Here, it similarly burgeoned out into the Congress activities, and more recently into those of the Muslim League, now together blossoming into Home Rule for India. The England of Milton, Cromwell, Sydney, Burke, Paine, Shelley, Wilberforce, Gladstone: the England that sheltered Mazzini, Kossuth, Kropotkin, Stepniak and that welcomed Garibaldi; the England that is the enemy of tyranny, the foe of autocracy, the lover of freedom, that is the England I would fain here represent to you to-day. Today, when India stands erect, no suppliant people, but a Nation, self-conscious, self-respecting determined, to be free; when she stretches out her hand to Britain and offers friendship, not subservience; co-operation, not obedience; to-day let me, Western born but in spirit Eastern, cradled in England but Indian by choice and adoption, let me stand as the symbol of union between Great Britain and India, a union of hearts and free choice, not of compulsion, and, therefore, of a tie which cannot be broken, a tie of love and of mutual helpfulness, beneficial to both Nations and blessed by God.

India's great leader, Dadabhai Naoroji, has left his mortal body and is now one of the company of the Immortals, who watch over and aid India's progress. He is with W. C. Bonerjee, and Ranade, and A. O. Hume, and Henry Cotton, and Pherozeshah Mehta, and Gopala Krishna Gokhale—the great men who, in Swinburne's noble verse, are the stars which lead us to Liberty's altar:

These, O men, shall ye honour,
Liberty only and these.
For thy sake and for all men's and mine,
Brother, the crowns of them shine,
Lighting the way to her shrine,
That our eyes may be fastened upon her.
That our hands may encompass her knees.

Not for me to praise him in feeble words of reverence and or homage. His deeds praise him, and his service to his country is his abiding glory. Our gratitude will be best paid by following in his footsteps, alike in his splendid courage and his unfaltering devotion, so that we may win the Home Rule which he longed to see while with us. and shall see. ere long, from the other world of Life in which he dwells to-day.

India and the War

The Great War, into the whirlpool of which Nation after Nation has been drawn, has entered on its fourth year. The rigid censorship which has been established makes it impossible for any outside the circle of Governments to forecast its duration, but to me, speaking for a moment not as a politician but as a student of spiritual laws, to me its end is sure. For the true object of this War is to prove the evil of, and to destroy, autocracy and the enslavement of one Nation by another, and to place on sure foundations the God-given right to Self-Rule and Self-Development of every Nation, and the similar right of the Individual, of the smaller Self, so far as is consistent with

the welfare of the larger Self of the Nation. The forces which make for the prolongation of autocracy—the rule of one—and the even deadlier bureaucracy—the rule of the close body welded into an iron system—these have been gathered together in the Central Powers of Europe—as of old in Ravana—in order that they may be destroyed; for the New Age cannot be opened until the Old passes away. The new civilisation of Righteousness and Justice, and therefore of Brotherhood, of ordered Liberty, of Peace, of Happiness, cannot be built up until the elements are removed which have brought the old civilisation crashing about our ears. Therefore it is necessary that the War shall be fought out to its appointed end, and that no premature peace shall leave its object unattained. Autocracy and bureaucracy must perish utterly in East and West, and, in order that their germs may not resprout in the future, they must be discredited in the minds of men. They must be proved to be less efficient than the Governments of Free People, even in their favourite game of war, and their iron machinery—which at first brings outer prosperity and success—must be shown to be less lasting and effective than the living and flexible organisations of democratic Peoples. They must be proved failures before the world so that the glamour of superficial successes may be destroyed for ever. They have had their day and their place in evolution, and have done their educative work. Now they are out-of-date, unfit for survival, and must vanish away.

When Great Britain sprang to arms, it was in defence of the freedom of a small Nation, guaranteed by treaties, and the great principles she proclaimed electrified India and the Dominions. They all sprang to her side without question, without delay; they heard the voice of old England, the soldier of Liberty, and it thrilled their hearts. All were unprepared, save the small territorial army of Great Britain, due to the genius and foresight of Lord Haldane, and the readily mobilised army of India, hurled into the fray by the swift decision of Lord Hardinge. The little army of Britain fought for time, fought

to stop the road to Paris, the heart of France, fought falling back step by step, and gained the time it fought for, till India's sons stood on the soil of France, were flung to the front, rushed past the exhausted regiments who cheered them with failing breath, charged the advancing hosts, stopped the retreat, and joined the British army in forming that unbreakable line which wrestled to the death through two fearful winters—often, these soldiers of the tropics, waist-deep in freezing mud—and knew no surrender.

India, with her clear vision, saw in Great Britain the champion of Freedom, in Germany the champion of despotism. And she saw rightly. Rightly she stood by Great Britain, despite her own lack of freedom and the coercive legislation which outrivalled German despotism, knowing these to be temporary, because un-English, and therefore doomed to destruction; she spurned the lure of German gold and rejected German appeals to revolt. She offered men and money; her educated classes, her Vakils, offered themselves as volunteers, pleaded to be accepted. Then the never-sleeping distrust of Anglo-India rejected the offer, pressed for money, rejected men. And, slowly, educated India sank back, depressed and disheartened, and a splendid opportunity for knitting together the two Nations was lost.

Early in the War, I ventured to say that the War could not nd until England recognised that autocracy and bureaucracy must perish in India as well as in Europe. The good Bishop of Calcutta, with a courage worthy of his free race, lately declared that it would be hypocritical to pray for victory over autocracy in Europe and to maintain it in India. Now, it has been clearly and definitely declared that Self-Government is to be the objective of Great Britain in India, and that a substantial measure of it is to be given at once; when this promise is made good by the granting of the Reforms outlined last year in Lucknow, then the end of the War will be in sight. For the War cannot till the death knell of autocracy is sounded.

Causes with which I will deal presently, and for which India

was not responsible, have somewhat obscured the first eager expressions of India's sympathy, and have forced her thoughts largely towards her own position in the Empire. But that does not detract from the immense aid she has given, and is still giving. It must not be forgotten that long before the present War, she had submitted—at first, while she had no power of remonstrance, and later, after 1885, despite the constant protests of Congress—to an ever-rising military expenditure, due partly to the amalgamation scheme of 1859, and partly to the cost of various wars beyond her frontiers, and to continually recurring frontier and trans-frontier expeditions, in which she had no real interest. They were sent out for supposed Imperial advantages, not for her own.

The financial burden incurred in consequence of the above conflicts, and of other causes, now to be mentioned, would not have been so much resented, if it had been imposed by India on herself, and if her own sons had profited by her being used as a training ground for the Empire. But in this case, as in so many others, she has shared Imperial burdens, while not sharing Imperial freedom and power. Apart from this, the changes which made the Army so ruinous a burden on the resources of the country were the system of "British reliefs", the using of India as a training ground for British regiments, and the transfer of the men thus trained, to be replaced by new ones under the short service system, the cost of the frequent transfers and their connected expenses being charged on the Indian revenues, while the whole advantage was reaped by Great Britain. On the short service system the Simla Army Commission declared: "The short service system recently introduced into the British army has increased the cost and has materially reduced the efficiency of the British troops in India. We cannot resist the feeling that, in the introduction of this system, the interest of the Indian taxpayer was entirely left out of consideration."

The remark was certainly justified, for the short service system gave India only five years of the recruits she paid heavily

for and trained, all the rest of the benefit going to England. The latter was enabled, as the years went on, to enormously increase her Reserves, so that she had 4,00,000 men trained in, and at the cost of, India.

In 1863 the Indian army consisted of 1,40,000 men, with 65,000 white officers. Great changes were made in 1885—1905, including the reorganisation under Lord Kitchener, who became Commander-in-Chief at the end of 1902. Even in this hasty review, I must not omit reference to the fact that Army Stores were drawn from Britain at enormous cost, while they should have been chiefly manufactured here, so that India might have profited by the expenditure. Lately, under the necessities of War, factories have been turned to the production of munitions; but this should have been done long ago, so that India might have been enriched instead of exploited. The War has forced an investigation into her mineral resources, that might have been made for her own sake, but Germany was allowed to monopolise the supply of minerals that India could have produced and worked up, and would have produced and worked up had she enjoyed Home Rule. India would have been richer and the Empire safer, had she been a partner instead of a possession.

Since 1885, the Congress has constantly protested against the ever-increasing military expenditure, but the voice of the Congress was supposed to be the voice of sedition and of class ambition, instead of being, as it was, the voice of educated Indians, the most truly patriotic and loyal class of the population. In 1885, in the First Congress, Mr. P. Rangiah Naidu pointed out that military expenditure had been £11,463.000 in 1857 and had risen to £16,975,750 in 1884. Mr. D. E. Wacha ascribed the growth to the amalgamation scheme of 1859, and remarked that the Company in 1856 had an army of 2,54,000 men at a cost of £11½ millions, while in 1884 the Crown had an army of only 1,81,000 men at a cost of £17 millions. The rise was largely due to the increased cost of the European regiments, overland transport service, stores, pensions, furlough allowances

and the like, most of them imposed against the resistance of the Government of India, which complained that the changes were "made entirely, it may be said, from Imperial considerations, in which Indian interests have not been consulted or advanced".

Year after year the Congress continued to remonstrate against the cost of the army, until in 1902 after all the futile protests of the intervening years, it condemned an increase of pay to British soldiers in India, which placed an additional burden on the Indian revenues of £ 7,86,000 a year, and pointed out that the British garrison was unnecessarily numerous, as was shown by the withdrawal of large bodies of British soldiers for service in South Africa and China. The very next year Congress protested that the increasing military expenditure was not to secure India against internal disorder or external attack, but in order to carry out an Imperial policy; the Colonies contributed little or nothing to the Imperial military expenditure, while India bore the cost of about one-third of the whole British Army in addition to her own Indian troops. Surely these facts should be remembered when India's military services to the Empire are now being weighed.

In 1904 and 1905, the Congress declared that the then military expenditure was beyond India's power to bear, and in the latter year prayed that the additional ten millions sterling, sanctioned for Lord Kitchener's reorganisation scheme, might be devoted to education and the reduction of the burden on the raiyats. In 1908, the burdens imposed by the British War Office since 1859 were condemned, and in the next year it was pointed out that the military expenditure was nearly a third of the whole Indian revenue, and was starving Education and Sanitation.

Lord kitchner's reorganisation scheme kept the Indian Army on a war footing ready for immediate mobilisation; and on January 1, 1915, the regular army consisted of 2,47,000 men, of whom 75,000 were English; it was the money spent by India in maintaining this army for years in readiness for war,

which made it possible for her to go to the help of Great Britain at the critical early period to which I alluded. She spent over £20 millions on the military services in 1914-15. In 1915-16 she spent £21.8 millions. In 1916-17 her military budget had risen to £22 millions; and it will be largely exceeded.

With such a record of deeds as the one I have boldly sketched, it is not necessary to say much in words as to India's support of Great Britain and her Allies. She has proved up to the hilt her desire to remain within the Empire, to maintain her tie with Great Britain. But if Great Britain is to call successfully on her man-power, as Lord Chelmsford suggests in his Man-power Board, then must the man who fights or labours have a man's rights in his own land. The lesson which springs out of this War is that it is absolutely necessary for the future safety of the Empire that India shall have Home Rule. Had her Man-power been utilised earlier there would have been no War, for none would have dared to provoke Great Britain and India to a contest. But her Man-power cannot be utilised while she is a subject Nation. She cannot afford to maintain a large army, if *she* is to support an English garrison, to pay for their goings and comings, to buy stores in England at exorbitant prices and send them back again when England needs them. She cannot afford to train men for England, and only have their services for five years. She cannot afford to keep huge Gold Reserves in England and be straitened for cash, while she lends to England, out of her Reserves, taken from her over-taxation, £27,000,000 for War expenses, and this, be it remembered, before the great War Loan. I once said in England: "The condition of India's loyalty is India's freedom." I may now add: "The condition of India's usefulness to the Empire is India's freedom." She will tax herself willingly when her taxes remain in the country and fertilise it, when they educate her people and thus increase their productive power, when they foster her trade and create for her new industries.

Great Britain needs India as much as India needs England, for prosperity in Peace as well as for safety in War. Mr. Montagu has wisely said that "for equipment in War a Nation needs freedom in Peace". Therefore I say that, for both countries alike, the lesson of the War is Home Rule for India.

Let me close this part of my subject by laying at the feet of His Imperial Majesty the loving homage of the thousands here assembled, with the hope and belief that, ere long, we shall lay there the willing and grateful homage of a free Nation.

The New Spirit in India

Apart from the natural exchange of thought between East and West, the influence of English education, literature and ideals, the effect of travel in Europe, Japan and the United States of America, and other recognised causes for the changed outlook in India, there have been special forces at work during the last few years to arouse a New Spirit in India, and to alter her attitude of mind. These may be summed up as: (a) The Awakening of Asia; (b) Discussions abroad on Alien Rule and Imperial Reconstruction; (c) Loss of Belief in the Superiority of the White Races; (d) The Awakening of the Merchants; (e) The Awakening of the Women to claim their Ancient Position; (f) The Awakening of the Masses.

Each of these causes has had its share in the splendid change of attitude in the Indian Nation, in the uprising of a spirit of pride of country, of independence, of self-reliance, of dignity, of self-respect. The War has quickened the rate of evolution of the world, and no country has experience the quickening more than our Motherland.

In a conversation I had with Lord Minto, soon after his arrival as Viceroy, he discussed the so-called "unrest in India", and recognised it as the inevitable result of English Education, of English Ideals of Democracy, of the Japanese victory over Russia, and of the changing conditions in the outer world. I

was therefore not surprised to read his remark that he recognised, "frankly and publicly, that new aspirations were stirring in the hearts of the people, that they were part of a larger movement common to the whole East, and that it was necessary to satisfy them to a reasonable extent by giving them a larger share in the administration".

But the present movement in India will be very poorly understood, if it be regarded only in connection with the movement in the East. The awakening of Asia is part of a world movement, which has been quickened into marvellous rapidity by the World War. The world movement is towards Democracy, and for the West dates from the breaking away of the American Colonies from Great Britain, consummated in 1776, and its sequel in the French Revolution of 1789. Needless to say that its root was in the growth of modern science, undermining the fabric of intellectual servitude, in the work of the Encyclopaedists, and in that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and of Thomas Paine. In the East, the swift changes in Japan, the success of the Japanese Empire against Russia, the downfall of the Manchu dynasty in China and the establishment of a Chinese Republic, the efforts at improvement in Persia, hindered by the interference of Russia and Great Britain with her growing ambition, and the creation of British and Russian "spheres of influence", depriving her of her just liberty, and now the Russian Revolution and the probable rise of a Russian Republic in Europe and Asia, have all entirely changed the conditions before existing in India. Across Asia, beyond the Himalayas, stretch free and self-ruling Nations. India no longer sees as her Asian neighbours the huge domains of a Tsar and a Chinese despot, and compares her condition under British rule with those of their subject populations. British rule profited by the comparison, at least until 1905, when the great period of repression set in. But in future, unless India wins Self-Government, she will look enviously at her Self-Governing neighbours and the contrast will intensify her unrest.

But even if she gains Home Rule, as I believe she will, her position in the Empire will imperatively demand that she shall be strong as well as free. She becomes not only a vulnerable point in the Empire, as the Asian Nations evolve their own ambitions and rivalries, but also a possession to be battled for. Mr. Laing once said: "India is a milch-cow of England", a Kamadhenu, in fact, a cow of plenty; and if that view should arise in Asia, the ownership of the milch-cow would become a matter of dispute, as of old between Vashishtha and Vishvamitra. Hence India must be capable of self-defence both by land and sea. There may be a struggle for the primacy of Asia, for supremacy in the Pacific for the mastery of Australasia, to say nothing of the inevitable trade-struggle, in which Japan is already endangering Indian industry and Indian trade, while India is unable to protect herself.

In order to face these larger issues with equanimity, the Empire requires a contented, strong, self-dependent and armed India, able to hold her own and to aid the Dominions, especially Australia, with her small population and immense unoccupied and undefended area. India alone has the man-power which can effectively maintain the Empire in Asia, and it is a short sighted, a criminally short-sighted, policy not to build up her strength as a Self-Governing State within the Commonwealth of Free Nations under the British Crown. The Englishmen in India talk loudly of their interests; what can this mere handful do to protect their interests against attack in the coming years? Only in a free and powerful India will they be safe. Those who read Japanese papers know how strongly, even during the War, they parade unchecked their pro-German sympathies, and how likely after the War is an alliance between these two ambitious and warlike Nations. Japan will come out of the War with her army and navy unweakened, and her trade immensely strengthened. Every consideration of sane statesmanship should lead Great Britain to trust India more than Japan, so that the British Empire in Asia may rest on the sure foundation of Indian loyalty,

the loyalty of a free and contented people, rather than be dependent on the continued friendship of a possible future rival. For international friendships are governed by National interests, and are built on quicksands, not on rock.

Englishmen in India must give up the idea that English dominance is necessary for the protection of their interests, amounting, in 1915, to £3,65,399,000 sterling. They do not claim to dominate the United States of America, because they have invested there £6,88,078,000. They do not claim to dominate the Argentine Republic, because they have invested there £2,69,808,000. Why then should they claim to dominate India on the ground of their investment? Britons must give up the idea that India is a possession to be exploited for their own benefit, and must see her as a friend, an equal, a Self-Governing Dominion within the Empire, a Nation like themselves, a willing partner in the Empire, and not a dependent. The democratic movement in Japan, China and Russia in Asia has sympathetically affected India, and it is idle to pretend that it will cease to affect her.

But there are other causes which have been working in India, consequent on the British attitude against autocracy and in defence of freedom in Europe, while her attitude to India has, until lately, been left in doubt. Therefore I spoke of a splendid opportunity lost. India at first believed whole-heartedly that Great Britain was fighting for the freedom of all Nationalities. Even now, Mr. Asquith declared—in his speech in the House of Commons, reported here last October, on the peace resolution of Mr. Ramsay MacDonald—that "the Allies are fighting for nothing but freedom and (an important addition) for nothing short of freedom". In his speech declaring that Britain would stand by France in her claim for the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine, he spoke of "the intolerable degradation of a foreign yoke". Is such a yoke less intolerable, less wounding to self-respect, here than in Alsace-Lorraine, where the rulers and the

ruled are both of European blood, similar in religion and habits? As the War went on, India slowly and unwillingly came to realise that the hatred of autocracy was confined to autocracy in the West, and that the degradation was only regarded as intolerable for men of white races; that freedom was lavishly promised to all except to India; that new powers were to be given to the Dominions, but not to India. India was markedly left out of the speeches of statesmen dealing with the future of the Empire, and at last there was plain talk of the White Empire, the Empire of the Five Nations, and the "coloured races" were lumped together as the wards of the White Empire, doomed to an indefinite minority.

The peril was pressing; the menace unmistakable. The Reconstruction of the Empire was on the anvil; what was to be India's place therein? The Dominions were proclaimed as partners; was India to remain a Dependency? Mr. Bonar Law bade the Dominions strike while the iron was hot; was India to wait till it was cold? India saw her soldiers fighting for freedom in Flanders, in France, in Gallipoli, in Asia Minor, in China, in Africa; was she to have no share of the freedom for which she fought? At last she sprang to her feet and cried, in the words of one of her noblest sons: "Freedom is my birthright; and I want it." The words "Home Rule" became her Mantram. She claimed her place in the Empire.

Thus, while she continued to support, and even to increase, her army abroad fighting for the Empire, and poured out her treasures as water for Hospital Ships, War Funds, Red Cross Organisations, and the gigantic War Loan, a dawning fear oppressed her, lest, if she did not take order with her own household, success in the War for the Empire might mean decreased liberty for herself.

The recognition of the right of the Indian Government to make its voice heard in Imperial matters, when they were under discussion in an Imperial Conference, was a step in the

right direction. But disappointment was felt that while other countries were represented by responsible Ministers, the representation in India's case was of the Government, of a Government irresponsible to her, and not the representative of herself. No fault was found with the choice, but only with the non-representative character of the chosen, for they were selected by the Government and not by the elected members of the Supreme Council.

It was said to be an epoch-making event that "Indian Representatives" took part in the conference. Representatives they were, but, as said, of the British Government in India, not of India, whereas their colleagues represented their Nations. They did good work, none the less, for they were able and experienced men, though they failed us in the Imperial Preference Conference and, partially, on the Indentured Labour question. Yet we hope that the presence in the Conference of men of Indian birth may prove to be the proverbial "thin end of the wedge", and may have convinced their colleagues that, while India was still a Dependency, India's sons were fully their equals.

The Report of the Public Services Commission, though now too obviously obsolete to be discussed, caused both disappointment and resentment; for it showed that, in the eyes of the majority of the Commissioners, English domination in Indian administration was to be perpetual, and that 30 years hence she would only hold a pitiful 25 per cent of the higher appointments in the I.C.S. and the Police. I cannot, however, mention that Commission, even in passing, without voicing India's thanks to the Hon. Mr. Justice Rahim, for his rare courage in writing a solitary Minute of Dissent, in which he totally rejected the Report and laid down the right principles which should govern recruitment for the Indian Civil Services.

India had but three representatives on the Commission; G. K. Gokhale died ere it made its Report, his end quickened by his sufferings during its work, by the humiliation of the way in which his countrymen were treated. Of Mr. Abdur Rahim, I have

already spoken. The Hon. Mr M. B. Chaubal signed the Report, but dissented from some of its most important recommendations. The whole Report was written "before the flood", and it is now merely an antiquarian curiosity.

India, for all these reasons, was forced to see before her a future of perpetual subordination: the Briton rules in Great Britain, the Frenchman in France, the American in America, each Dominion in its own area, but the Indian was to rule nowhere; alone among the peoples of the world, he was not to feel his own country as his own. "Britain for the British" was right and natural; "India for the Indians" was wrong, even seditious. It must be "India for the Empire", or not even for the Empire but "for the rest of the Empire", careless of herself. "British support for British Trade" was patriotic and proper in Britain. "Swadeshi goods for Indians" showed a petty and anti-Imperial spirit in India. The Indian was to continue to live perpetually, and even thankfully, as Gopal Krishna Gokhale said he lived now, in "an atmosphere of inferiority", and to be proud to be a citizen (without rights) of the Empire, while its other component Nations were to be citizens (with rights) in their own countries first, and citizens of the Empire secondarily. Just as his trust in Great Britain was strained nearly to breaking point came the glad news of Mr. Montagu's appointment as Secretary of State for India, of the Viceroy's invitation to him and of his coming to hear for himself what India wanted. It was a ray of sunshine breaking through the gloom, confidence in Great Britain revived, and glad preparation was made to welcome the coming of a friend.

The attitude of India has changed to meet the changed attitude of the Governments of India and Great Britain. But let none imagine that that consequential change of attitude connotes any change in her determination to win Home Rule. She is ready to consider terms of peace, but it must be "peace with honour", and honour in this connection means Freedom. If this be not granted, an even more vigorous agitation will begin.

The undermining of belief in the superiority of the white races dates from the spreading of the Arya Samaj and the Theosophical Society. Both bodies sought to lead the Indian people to a sense of the value of thier own civilisation, to pride in their past, creating self-respect in the present, and self-confidence in the future. They destroyed the unhealthy inclination to imitate the West in all things, and taught discrimination, the using only of what was valuable in Western thought and culture, instead of a mere slavish copying of everything. Another great force was that of Swami Vivekananda, alike in his passionate love and admiration for India, and his exposure of the evils resulting from Materialism in the West.

The process was continued by the admiration of Sanskrit literature expressed by European scholars and philosophers. But the effect of these was confined to the few and did not reach the many. The first great shock to their belief in white superiority came from the triumph of Japan over Russia, the facing of a huge European Power by a comparatively small eastern Nation, the exposure of the weakness and rottenness of the Russian leaders, and the contrast with their hardy, virile opponents, ready to sacrifice everything for their country.

The second great shock has come from the frank brutality of German theories of the State, and their practical carrying out in the treatment of conquered districts and the laying waste of evacuated areas in retreat. The teachings of Bismarck and their practical application in France, Flanders, Belgium, Poland and Serbia have destroyed all the glamour of the superiority of Christendom over Asia. Its vaunted civilisation is seen to be but a thin veneer, and its religion a matter of form rather than of life. Gazing from afar at the ghastly heaps of dead and the hosts of the mutilated, as science turned into devilry and ever inventing new tortures for rending and slaying, Asia may be forgiven for thinking that, on the whole, she prefers her own religions and her own civilisations.

But even deeper than the outer tumult of war has pierced

the doubt as to the reality of the Ideals of Liberty and Nationality so loudly proclaimed by the foremost Western Nations, the doubt of the honesty of their champions, Sir James Meston said truly, a short time ago, that he had never, in his long experience, known Indians in so distrustful and suspicious a mood as that which he met in them today. And that is so. For long years Indians have been chaffing over the many breaches of promises and pledges to them that remain unredeemed. The maintenance here of a system of political repression, of coercive measures increased in number and more harshly applied since 1905, the carrying of the system to a wider extent since the War for the sanctity of treaties and for the protection of Nationalities has been going on, have deepened the mistrust. A frank and courageous statesmanship applied to the honest carrying out of the large reforms too long delayed, can alone remove it. The time for political tinkering is past; the time for wise and definite changes is here.

To these deep causes must be added the comparison between the progressive policy of some of the Indian States in matters which most affect the happiness of the people, and the slow advance made under British administration. The Indian notes that this advance is made under the guidance of rulers and ministers of his own race. When he sees that the suggestions made in the People's Assembly in Mysore are fully considered and, when possible, given effect to, he realises that without the forms of power, the members exercise more real power than those in our Legislative Councils. He sees education spreading, new industries fostered, villagers encouraged to manage their own affairs and take the burden of their own responsibility, and he wonders why Indian incapacity is so much more efficient than British capacity.

Perhaps, after all, for Indians, Indian rule may be the best.

The Awakening of the Merchants

Of the many forces that have created New India, the

awakening of the Merchants into political life is perhaps the most potent, and the most pregnant with happy possibilities. Sir Dorab Tata, in the Industrial Conference in Bombay in 1915, advocated the yoking together of Politics and Industry. It is now coming about. Hitherto the merchants had remained immersed in their own occupations, but they were awakened by the War to the necessity of taking part in politics by finding that those very occupations were threatened with disaster by the attitude of the Government; as for instance, the refusal to lend a helping hand to industries which had been connected closely with German trade and were menaced with ruin by the War; by the refusal to aid the efforts made to replace necessaries, hitherto supplied by Germany, by the founding or financing of factories for their production at home; by the restrictions put on trade under pretext of the War, that prevented the legitimate expansion of promsing branches of industry; by the absence of effort to relieve the stringency of the money market, wealthy merchants being unable to obtain cash to meet their liabilities here, because their English debtors could not transmit the money they owed; some were even obliged to sell the depreciated Government paper at heavy loss in order to maintain their credit; in other cases War Bonds were offered to them in lieu of cash for goods supplied. The details have varied in different centres, and the wealthy and independent merchants of Bombay have suffered less than the merchants of Madras, with whose difficulties I am naturally more familiar.

There, added difficulties constantly arise from the favouritism shown by the Presidency Bank to the English, as compared with Indian clients, and the absence of Indians from its Directorate, complained of for years. The anxiety felt by the merchants was largely increased by the depreciation of Government paper, and apart from the heavy losses of capital incurred when necessity forced holders to sell for cash, an uneasy feeling arose as to the stability of the Government, when its securities fell so low. . . .

The War has turned the attention of Government to the wisdom of utilising India's immense natural resources, and the Viceroy speaks of organising these resources with "a view to making India more self-contained, and less dependent on the outer world for the supplies of manufactured goods". We heartily endorse this view. This has long been the cry from Indians, for India, with her varieties of soil and climate, can produce all the materials she needs, and with her surplus goods she can, as Phillimore said of her in the 17th century, "with the droppings of her soil feed distant nations". But the East India Company first, the British Government next, and lately exploiting bodies of imperialist traders, have vehemently insisted that India should supply raw materials, export them for manufacture abroad, and purchase, preferably within the Empire, the goods manufactured out of them. As Macaulay pointed out, the marvellous expansion of English industry was contemporaneous with the impoverishment of India. The reversal of this policy by the present Viceroy will earn India's undying gratitude, if he fosters Indian industries and not English industries in India. A witness before the Industries Commission stated that India should raise products for use outside, that is, as the East India Company put it, become a plantation for the supply of raw materials. The Viceroy must pardon us, if previous experience has made us anxious on this point. We cannot forget that a century ago the traces of iron were found in the Central Provinces, and that nothing was done to extract the metal—England then being the world's shop for iron to her own huge profit, and not desiring a rival. It was left for Tata to seize the opportunity; and his shares of Rs. 30 are now sold at Rs. 1,180. He started a great industry. And Tata's steel is sought so largely that he cannot meet the demand. Had the iron been raised and worked here during these long years, we should not now be dependent on Britain for our machinery, the want of which cripples the efforts to find new industries and to expand old ones in order to supply the demand caused by the necessary absorption of factories in Great Britain

for War work....

However, the War has done for India, in awakening the interest of the Government in her industries, that which the attempts of Indian patriots have failed to do. The War brought about the Industries Commission, and the need for munitions has forced industrial organisation for their production. It is for Indian merchants to see, by seizing and utilising the political weapon, that the organisation and encouragement of industry by Government does not reduce Indians to a more subordinate position than they now hold. It is this danger which is playing a great part in the fear which has caused the Awakening of the Merchants. The tea industry, for instance, is in the hands of English planters, and while incomes drawn from other agricultural profits have been taxed, incomes derived from tea—which is certainly an agricultural profit—have wholly escaped till lately. If this policy be pursued, and the fostering of industries with Indian money places the industries in foreign hands, Indians will, even more than now, be *dubashes,* and clerks, and other employees of English-captained firms, and will depend ever more and more on wages, driven lower and lower by increasing competition.

Indian merchants have seen the swift expansion of Japanese trade, and know, that it is fostered by the Japanese Government both by protection and with bounties. They have to compete with it in their own land. Is it any wonder that they desire an Indian Government? They see Japanese goods underselling them and flooding their own markets. Is it any wonder that they desire a Home Government, that will put duties on these foreign goods and protect their own products?

The Awakening of the Women

The position of women in the ancient Aryan civilisation was a very noble one. The great majority married becoming as Manu said the Light of the Home; some took up the ascetic life,

remained unmarried, and sought the knowledge of Brahman. The story of the Rani Damayanti, to whom her husband's ministers came, when they were troubled by the Raja's gambling; that of Gandhari, in the council of kings and warrior chiefs, remonstrating with her headstrong son; in later days, those of Padmavati of Chittor; of Mirabai of Marwar, the sweet poetess; of Tarabai of Thoda, the warrior; of Chand Bibi, the defender of Ahemednagar; of Ahalya Bai of Indore, the great ruler—all these and countless others are well-known.

Only in the last five or six generations has the Indian woman slipped away from her place at her husband's side, and left him unhelped in his public life. Even now, they wield great influence over husband and son, but lack thorough knowledge to aid. Culture has never forsaken them, but the English education of their husbands and sons, with the neglect of Sanskrit and the vernacular, has made a barrier between the culture of the husband and that of the wife, and has shut the woman out from her old sympathy with the larger life of men. While the interests of the husband have widened, those of the wife have narrowed. The materialising of the husband has tended also by reaction to render the wife's religion less broad and wise and also, by throwing her on the family priest for guidance in religion instead of on her husband, has made her religion entirely one of devotion, and lacking the strong stimulus of knowledge, it more easily slides down into superstition, into dependence on forms not understood.

The wish to save their sons from the materialising results of English education awoke keen sympathy among Indian mothers with the movement to make Hiduism an integral part of education. It was, perhaps, the first movement in modern days which aroused among them in all parts of India a keen and living interest.

Then the troubles of Indians outside India roused the ever-quick sympathy of Indian women, and the attack in South Africa on the sacredness of Indian marriage drew large numbers of

them out of their homes to protest against the wrong.

The partition of Bengal was bitterly resented by Bengali women, and was another factor in the outward-turning change. When the editor of an extremist newspaper was prosecuted for sedition, convicted and sentenced, 500 Bengali women went to his mother to show their sympathy, not by condolences, but by congratulations. Such was the feeling of the well-born women of Bengal.

The Indentured Labour question, involving the dishonour of women, again moved them deeply, and even sent a deputation to the Viceroy composed of women.

These were, perhaps, the chief outer causes; but deep in the heart of India's daughters arose the Mother's voice, calling on them to help her to arise, and to be once more mistress in her own household. Indian women, nursed on her old literature, with its wonderful ideals of womanly perfection, could not remain indifferent to the great movement for India's liberty. And during the last few years the hidden fire long burning in their hearts, fire of love for Bharatmata, fire of resentment against the lessened influence of the religion which they passionately love, instinctive dislike of the foreigner ruling in their land, have caused a marvellous awakening. The strength of the Home Rule movement is rendered tenfold greater by the adhesion to it of large numbers of women, who bring to its helping the uncalculating heroism, the endurance, the self-sacrifice, of the feminine nature. Our League's best recruits and recruiters are among the women of India, and the women of Madras boast that they marched in procession when the men were stopped, and that their prayers in the temple set in the interned captives free. Home Rule has become so intertwined with religion by the prayers offered up in the great Southern Temples—sacred places of pilgrimage—and spreading from them to village temples, and also by its being preached, up and down the country, by Sadhus and Sannyasins, that it has become in the minds of the women and of the over-religious masses, inextricably intertwined with

religion. That is in this country, the surest way of winning alike the women of the higher classes and the men and women villagers. And that is why I have said that the two words, "Home Rule", have become a *Mantram*.

Awakening of the Masses

The awakening of the masses is another startling phenomenon of our times, due of late to the teaching of Sadhus and Sannyasins and the campaign of prayer, just mentioned, but much more to the steady influence of the educated classes permeating the masses for very many years, the classes which, as we shall see, have their roots struck deep in the villages. It must be remembered that the raiyat, though innocent of English, has a culture of his own made up of old traditions and legends and folklore, coming down from time immemorial. He is religious, knows the great laws of Karma and Reincarnation, is industrious and shrewd. He cares very little for who is the "Sirkar", and very much for the agents who come to collect his tax, or to meddle with his fields. In the old days, which for him still live, the Panchayat managed the village affairs, and he was prosperous and contended, save when the King's tax-gatherer came or soldiers harried his village. These were inevitable, natural evils, like drought or flood; and if a raid came or an invasion, they felt they were suffering with their King, whereas they are crushed now in an iron machinery, without the human nexus that used to exist.

Home Rule has touched the raiyat through his village life, where the present order presses hard upon him in ways that I shall refer to when dealing with agricultural conditions. He resents the rigid payment of tax in money instead of the variable tax in kind, the King's share of the produce. He resents the frequent resettlements, which force him to borrow from the money-lender to meet the higher claim. He wants the old Panchayat back again; he wants that his villages should be managed by himself

and his fellows and he wants to get rid of the tyranny of petty officials, who have replaced the old useful communal servants.

We cannot leave out of the causes which have helped to awaken the masses, the influence of the Co-operative Movement, and the visits paid to villages by educated men for lectures on sanitation, hygiene, and other subjects. In many parts of the country, where conferences are carried on in the vernacular, the raiyats attended in large numbers, and often take part of the practical discussions on local affairs. They have begun to hope, and to feel that they are a part of the great National Movement, and that for them also a better day is dawning.

The submerged classes have also felt the touch of a ray of hope, and are lifting up their bowed heads, and claiming, with more and more definiteness, their place in the Household of the Mother. Movements, created by themselves, or originating in the higher castes, have been stirring in them a sense of self-respect. The Brahmanas, awakening to a sense of their long-neglected duty, have done much to help them, and the prospect of their future brightens year by year.

By a just Karma the higher castes are finding that attempts are being made by official and non-official Europeans to stir the submerged classes into opposition to Home Rule. They play upon the contempt with which they had been treated, and threaten them with a return of it if "Brahmana Rule", as they call it, is gained. Twenty years ago and more, I ventured to urge the danger to Hindu Society that was hidden within the neglect of the submerged, and the folly of making it profitable for them to embrace Islam or Christianity, which offered them a higher social status. Much has been done since then, but it is only a drop in the ocean needed. They know very well, of course, that all the castes, not the highest alone, are equally guilty, but that is a sorry comfort. Large numbers of them are, happily, willing to forget the past, and to work with their Indian fellow-countrymen for the future. It is the urgent duty of every lover of the Motherland to draw these, her neglected children, into the

common Home.

Why India Demands Home Rule

Mr. Gandhi's capital idea of a monster petition for the Congress-League scheme, for which signatures were only to be taken after careful explanation of its scope and meaning has proved to be an admirable method of political propaganda. The soil in the Madras Presidency had been well prepared by a wide distribution of popular literature, and the Propaganda Committee had scattered over the land in the vernaculars a simple explanation of Home Rule. The result of active work in the villages during the last year showed itself in the gathering in less than a month of nearly a million signatures. They have been taken in duplicate, to that we have a record of huge number of people, interested in Home Rule, and the hosts will increase in ever-widening circles, preparing for the coming Freedom.

India demands Home Rule for two reasons, one essential and vital, the other less important but weighty: First, because Freedom is the birthright of every Nation; secondly because her most important interests are now made subservient to the interests of the British Empire without her consent, and her resources are not utilised for her greatest needs. It is enough only to mention the money spent on her Army not for local defence but for Imperial puposes, as compared with that spent on primary education.

Self-Government is necessary to the self-respect and dignity of a People; other-Government emasculates a Nation, lowers its character, and lessens its capacity. The wrong done by the Army Act, which Raja Rampal Singh voiced in the Second Congress as a wrong which outweighed all the benefits of British Rule, was its weakening and debasing effect on Indian manhood. "We cannot", he declared, "be grateful to it for degrading our natures, for systematically crushing out all martial spirit, for converting a race of soldiers and heroes into a timid flock of

quill-driving sheep." This was done not by the fact that a man did not carry arms—few carry them in England—but that men were deprived of the right to carry them. A Nation, an individual, cannot develop his capacities to the utmost, without Liberty. And this is recognised everywhere except in India. As Mazzini truly said, "God has written a line of His thought over the cradle of every people. That is its special mission. It cannot be cancelled; it must be freely developed."

For, what is a nation? It is a spark of the Divine Fire, a fragment of the Divine Life, outbreathed into the world, and gathering round itself a mass of individuals, men, women and children, whom it binds together into one. Its qualities, its powers, in a word, its type, depend on the fragment of the Divine Life embodied in it, the Life which shapes it, evolves it, colours it, and makes it One. The magic of Nationality is the feeling of oneness, and the use of Nationality is to serve the world in the particular way for which its type fits it. This is what Mazzini called "its special mission", the duty given to it by God in its birth-hour. Thus India had the duty of spreading the idea of Dharma, Persia that of Purity, Egypt that of Science, Greece that of Beauty, Rome that of Law. But to render its full service Humanity it must develop along its own lines, and be self-dertermined in its evolution. It must be itself, and not Another. The whole world suffers where a Nationality is destroyed or suppressed before its mission to the world is accomplished.

Hence the cry of a Nation for Freedom, for Self-Rule, is not a cry of mere selfishness demanding more Rights that it may enjoy more happiness. Even in that there is nothing wrong, for happiness means fullness of life, and to enjoy such fullness is a righteous claim. But the demand for Self-Rule is a demand for the evolution of its own nature for the Service of Humanity. It is a demand of the deepest Spirituality, an expression of the longing to give its very best to the world. Hence dangers cannot check it, nor threats appal, nor offerings of greater Pleasures lure it to give up its demand for Freedom. Better hardship and

freedom, than luxury and thraldom. This is the spirit of the Home Rule movement, and therefore it cannot be crushed, it cannot be destroyed, it is eternal and ever young. Nor can it be persuaded to exchange its birthright for any mess of efficiency-pottage at the hands of the bureaucracy.

Coming closer to the daily life of the people as individuals, we see that the character of each man, woman and child is degraded and weakened by a foreign administration, and this is most keenly felt by the best Indians. . . .

This stunting of the race begins with the education of the child. The schools differentiate between British and Indian teachers; the colleges do the same. The students see first-class Indians superseded by young and third-rate foreigners; the Principal of a college should be a foreigner; foreign history is more important than Indian; to have written on English villages is a qualification for teaching economics in India; the whole atmosphere of the school and college emphasises the superiority of the foreigner, even when the professors abstain from open assertion thereof. The Education Department controls the education given and it is planned on foreign models, and its object is to serve foreign rather than native ends, to make docile Government servants rather than patriotic citizens; high spirits, courage, self-respect, are not encouraged, and docility is regarded as the most precious quality in the student; pride in country, patriotism, ambition, are looked on as dangerous, and English, instead of Indian, ideals are exalted; the blessings of a foreign rule and the incapacity of Indians to manage their own affairs are constantly inculcated. What wonder that boys thus trained often turn out, as men time-servers and sycophants, and, finding their legitimate ambitions frustrated, become selfish and care little for the public weal? Their own inferiority has been so driven into them during their most impressionable years that they do not even feel what Mr. Asquith called the "intolerable degradation of a foreign yoke."

It is not a question whether the rule is good or bad.

German efficiency in Germany is far greater than English efficiency in England; the Germans were better fed, had more amusements and leisure, less crushing poverty than the English. But would any Englishman therefore desire to see Germans occupying all the highest positions in England? Why not? Because the righteous self-respect and dignity of the free man revolt against foreign domination, however superior. As Mr. Asquith said at the beginning of the War, such a condition was "inconceivable and would be intolerable". Why then is it the one conceivable system here in India? Why is it not felt by all Indians to be intolerable? It is because it has become a habit, bred in us from childhood, to regard the "sahab-log" as our natural superiors, and the greatest injury British rule has done to Indians is to deprive them of the natural instinct born in all free peoples, the feeling of an inherent right to self-determination, to be themselves. Indian dress, Indian food, Indian ways, Indian customs, are all looked on as second-rate; the Indian mother-tongue and Indian literature cannot make an educated man. Indians as well as English men take it for granted that the natural rights of every Nation do not belong to them; they claim "a larger share in the government of the country", instead of claiming the government of their own country, and they are expected to feel grateful for "boons", for concessions. Britain is to say what she will give. The whole thing is wring, topsy-turvy, irrational. Thank God that India's eyes are opening; that myriads of her people realise that they are men, with a man's right to freedom in his own country, a man's right to manage his own affairs. India is no longer on her knees for boons; she is on her feet for Rights. It is because I have taught this, that the English in India misunderstand me, call me seditious; it is because I have taught this, that I am President of this Congress to-day.

This may seem strong language, because the plain truth is not usually put in India. But this is what every Briton feels in Britain for his own country, and what every Indian should feel

in India for his. This is the Freedom for which the Allies are fighting; this is Democracy, the Spirit of the Age. And this is what every true Briton will feel is India's Right, the moment India claims it for herself, as she is claiming it now. When this Right is gained, then will the tie between India and Great Britain become a golden link of mutual love and service, and the iron chain of a foreign yoke will fall away. We shall live and work side by side with no sense of distrust and dislike, working as brothers for common ends. And from that union shall arise the mightiest Empire, or rather Commonwealth, that the world has ever known, a Commonwealth that, in God's good time, shall put an end to War . . . .

Many observers of Indian public life have noted the fissiparous tendency in our political associations, and reactionaries make this a reason for denying to us constitutional liberty. Rightly considered, it is a reason for granting it, though to some this statement may seem paradoxical. But what is the position?

We have a Nation, composed of many communities and opinions, trying to obtain liberty. We have above it, a Government, holding all power and all patronage, and able to crush by executive orders those whom it considers to be advocates of excessive changes. It tends to ally itself with any party or community which will help it to stave off legislation that diminishes its power. Its natural tendency is to watch for any sign of fission, and to ally itself with the weaker party to crush the stronger, as did the East India Company in its so-called "conquest of India". If there be no sign of fission, it may be possible to initiate one, on the lines of the despatch to Lord Lytton the then Viceroy of India with regard to a desired War: "If there be no pretext, you must invent one." A similar policy was followed when Dadabhai Naoroji was sent to the British Parliament; Mr. Bhowngari was set up against him, and succeeded in ousting a strong reformer and replacing him by a reactionary. No political situation could be more unhealthy.

First take the two great communities of Hindus and

Musalmans. They form two natural parties in the Nation with the Christian Government above them as the third party for whose favour they compete. Hence Hindu-Musalman divisions, riots and the rest—which do not exist in Indian States, wherein the Ruler belongs to one of the two great religions, and has to rule men of both—and the constant efforts to dissolve the *Entente Cordiale* arrived at after long discussions at Calcutta and at Lucknow last year.

There will always be a number in each community who do not feel themselves bound by any agreement come to by the organised political bodies, containing the more reasonable and far-seeing of each community; and these again, motivated by bribe or threat, unofficial but made by officials, an unorganised and irresponsible crowd, will always lend recruits to support the Government in the hope of obtaining special concessions for their sectional interests.

Hence, also, the anti-Brahmana movement in the Madras Presidency, with its Association of a few hnndered members and its three organs in the Press. . . . The anti-Brahmana movement aims chiefly at places in the administration, and hopes to gain them more easily by praising the Government and opposing Home Rulers.

Hence, also, various similar movements in other Provinces, any stick being good enough for beating the Home Rule dog.

There is no need for anxiety about these divisions, which must always present kaleidoscopic changes so long as India is under the rule of an irresponsible Government.

When the third, non-national, party no longer governs, the National parties will become grouped into healthy constituents of the body politic, distinguished by differences of principle. The use of power will create a sense of responsibility and responsibility will bring about reasonable discipline.

We make too much of these transitory difficulties and quarrels, and give them an importance far beyond their real mischief-making power. They will assume their proper pro-

portions when we have won Home Rule.

I do not propose to dwell on the isolated Reforms for which the Congress has asked during the whole period of its existence. The majority of Congressmen are tired of asking for the same thing over and over again, and feel that it is better to concentrate on Home Rule, since, once the people have power, they can get rid of bad laws and make good ones for themselves.

Indian Legislatures will take up the Congress Resolutions, and carry into law all that are applicable to the changed conditions. Free India will separate Executive from Judicial functions, and also separate Revenue Officers, Judiciary and Police, place the lower Judiciary under the High Court instead of the Executive, pass Education Acts, make trial by Jury general, protect her Emigrants and Indians settled abroad, deal with Land Settlement equitably, organise and develop Indian Industries, examine for her Services within her own borders, reorganise her administration so as to abolish racial inequalities, and establish Military Colleges to fit her youth for the Emperor's Commissions.

The whole of the special legislation against constitutional agitation—as understood in Great Britain—penalising writing and speech which do not incite to crime nor transgress the law of libel, will be swept away as unworthy of a civilised country. The Executive will be deprived of the power to punish without trial, to imprison, incarcerate, impoverish, deport, intern and extern, on secret police accusations and suspicions, and confidential reports of magistrates. No man shall thus suffer without knowing his offence, nor be deprived of liberty without open trial and full opportunity of defence. Peaceful political propaganda, processions, flags and meetings will not be interfered with by Magistrates and Police Officers. In fact, India will once more enjoy the ordinary elementary human rights secured by Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights.

Think of the joy of being a free man in a free country, the equal of other civilised men; of breathing in an India at last

purged of the poisonous atmosphere of coercion; of knowing that liberty of person and safety of property cannot be touched save by open trial; that one cannot become a criminal unconsciously, and at the whim of an Executive, shrouded in darkness; that one enjoys the ordinary liberty of a civilised human being in a country ruled by law alone, uninterfered with by arbitrary Executive Orders. That security can only come to us with Home Rule.

Fellow-delegates, pardon me that I have kept you so long. Only once in my life can I take this Congress Chair, and speak my heart out to you on this country that we love so well. Who can tell, in the present keen strife, if I shall be left free to speak to you again, to work with you as your leader, during this coming year of office? If I am allowed to carry on my work, then I crave your help during the coming year. You have trusted me enough to elect me as your President; trust me enough to work with me as your President, until I prove false to your trust. You cannot always agree with me, and I do not shrink from your criticism. I only ask you not to take for granted the truth of everything said against me by my enemies, for I cannot spare time to answer them. I cannot promise to please you always, but I can promise to strive my best to serve the Nation, as I judge of service. I cannot promise to agree with and to follow you always; the duty of a leader is to lead. While he should always consult his colleagues and listen to their advice, the final responsibility before the public must be his, and his, therefore, the final decision. A general should see further than his officers and his army, and cannot explain, while battles are going on, every move in a campaign: he is to be justified or condemned by his results. Up till now, knowing myself to be of this Nation only by love and service, not by birth, I have claimed no authority of leadership, but have only fought in the front of the battle and served as best I might. Now, by your election, I take the place which you have given, and will fill it worthily. Enough of myself. Let us think of the Mother.

To see India free, to see her hold up her head among the Nations, to see her sons and daughters respected everywhere, to see her worthy of her mighty past, engaged in building a yet mightier future—is not this worth working for, worth suffering for, worth living and worth dying for? Is there any other land which evokes such love for her spirituality, such admiration for her literature, such homage for her valour, as this glorious Mother of Nations, from whose womb went forth the races that now, in Europe and America, are leading the world? And has any land suffered as our India has suffered, since her sword was broken on Kurukshetra, and the peoples of Europe and of Asia swept across her borders, laid waste her cities, and discrowned her Kings? They came to conquer, but they remained to be absorbed. At last, out of those mingled peoples, the Divine Artificer has welded a Nation, compact not only of her own virtues, but also of those her foes had brought to her, and gradually eliminating the vices which they had also brought.

After a history of millennia, stretching far back out of the ken of mortal eyes; having lived with, but not died with, the mighty civilisations of the Past; having seen them rise and flourish and decay, untill only their sepulchres remained, deep buried in earth's crust; having wrought, and triumphed, and suffered and having survived all changes unbroken, India, who has been verily the Crucified among Nations, now stands on this her Resurrection morning, the Immortal, the Glorious, the Ever-Young; and India shall soon be seen, proud and self-reliant, strong and free, the radiant Splendour of Asia, the Light and the Blessing of the World.

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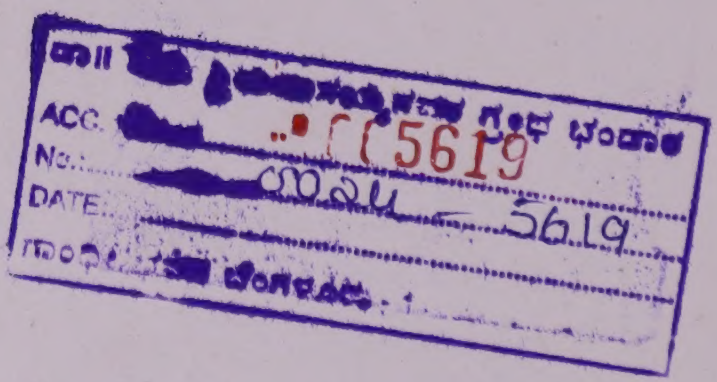
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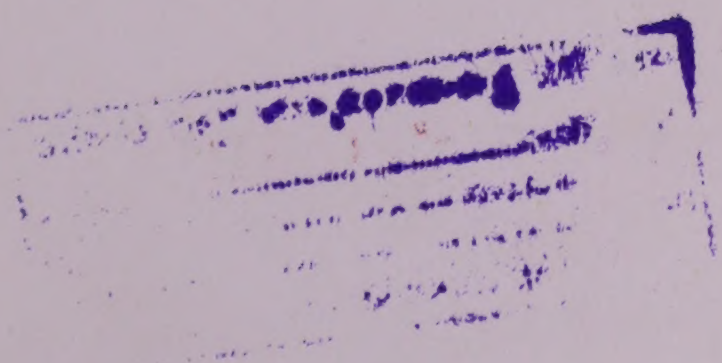

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